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▲ *A memorial to the victims at the Covenant School in Nashville. Six people, three children and three adults, were killed in the attack. Photograph: Mark Zaleski/AP*

Nashville school shooter legally stockpiled weapons before attack

Richard Luscombe

The killer of three children and three adults at a Christian elementary school in Tennessee bought numerous firearms in the weeks leading up to the mass shooting, police have revealed.

Audrey Hale, 28, was under a doctor's care for an unspecified emotional disorder at the time of the rampage, the Nashville police chief, John Drake, said at a Tuesday afternoon media briefing.

Drake said he believed those killed at the Covenant school, including three nine-year-olds, were not specifically targeted.

"We've determined that [the killer] bought seven firearms from five different gun stores here legally," Drake said. "Three of those weapons were used yesterday during the horrific tragedy.

"Law enforcement knew nothing about the treatment she was receiving but her parents felt she should not own weapons. They were under the impression that she sold one weapon and did not own any more. As it turned out, she had been hiding several weapons within the house."

Police released highly dramatic body-camera video of officers moving though the school and confronting and killing the attacker. The officers, Drake said, "heard gunfire, immediately ran to that, and took care of this horrible situation".

The video prompted many to draw a contrast between the handling of the Nashville shooting and the one last year at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, where officers waited more than an hour to confront and kill an intruder who killed 19 children and two teachers.

However, Nashville law enforcement has been accused of failing to respond properly to a report that Hale sent social media messages to a friend before the attack, warning: "Something bad is about to happen."

Drake did not address the matter at the Tuesday briefing.

The messages to a former middle school basketball teammate, sent less than an hour before the killings, were "basically a suicide note", the attacker wrote, and "you'll probably hear about me on the news after I die".

The friend, Averianna Patton, shared the Instagram exchange with News Channel 5, suggesting police showed a lack of urgency after she alerted them.

Patton said she called 911, was told to call another police department's non-emergency number, was placed on hold for almost seven minutes, then was promised a visit from an officer that came only five hours after the shooting.

"I learned Audrey was the shooter and that she had reached out to me prior to the shooting," Patton said, referring to Hale, who identified as transgender. "My heart is with all of the families affected and I'm devastated by what has happened."

Also on Tuesday, Joe Biden repeated his call for an assault weapons ban. Speaking at a financial conference in Durham, North Carolina, the president said the second amendment, which protects gun ownership rights, was "not absolute".

"You're not allowed to own an automatic weapon. You're not allowed to own a machine gun. You're not allowed to have a flamethrower. You're not allowed so many other things. Why in God's name do we allow these weapons of war in our streets and in our schools?

"Overwhelmingly, a majority of gun owners agree we have to do something. Last year we came together to pass the most significant gun safety legislation in 30 years. It was bipartisan. We got it done. Don't tell me we can't do more together."

The legislation last year only expanded background checks for the youngest gun buyers and funded mental health and violence intervention programs.

In Nashville, detectives continued to piece together a motive for the murders by a former student at the school, as a heartbroken community began to grieve with prayer vigils and a growing memorial of flowers and soft toys.

The victims were Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney, all aged nine; substitute teacher Cynthia Peak, 61; head of school Katherine Koonce, 60; and Mike Hill, 61, a custodian.

Their murders were, according to the Gun Violence Archive, the 129th mass shooting in the US this year. The archive defines a mass shooting as one in which four or more people are shot or wounded, not counting any attackers.

In an earlier TV interview on Tuesday, Drake said Hale left a "manifesto" before shooting her way into the school

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armed with two "assault-style" weapons.

"There was possibly some resentment for having to go to that school," he told CBS News. "We have a booklet that shows exactly what she had planned to do. We have maps that showed the entry point into the school, the weapons that was going to be used, the clothing that she was going to wear, and she had drawn it up almost like a cartoon character.

"It was exactly what she had on during this incident."

The mayor of Nashville, John Cooper, praised the speed of the police response, which he said meant the shooting "was dealt with in only 14 minutes". The officers who killed Hale on the second floor were named as Rex Engelbert and Michael Collazo.

The officers, Cooper told CNN, "were running into gunfire and under a lot of gunfire".

"This is our worst day," the mayor said. "But it could have been worse without this great response."

Separate surveillance footage published on Monday showed Hale arriving in a vehicle, shooting through glass entry doors, then wandering hallways with rifle raised.

A Democratic state legislator, John Ray Clemmons, condemned a loosening of gun laws in 2021, including allowing anyone over 18 to possess and carry weapons without training or a permit.

"We've been banning books up here, not guns," he told CNN. "We make it harder to vote than to buy an AK. We allow permit-less carry in Tennessee and our governor had the gall to sign that bill at a Beretta manufacturing plant. That's the climate, that's the uphill battle I'm fighting."

Flags were ordered to half-staff throughout the state. School leaders asked for privacy.

"Our community is heartbroken," they said. "We are grieving tremendous loss and are in shock coming out of the terror that shattered our school and church. We are focused on loving our students, our families, our faculty and staff, and beginning the process of healing."

Koonce had worked at the school for seven years after moving from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The other two adult victims were both employed there.

Scruggs was a third-grade student and the daughter of the Covenant Presbyterian church lead pastor, Chad Scruggs.

Dieckhaus was also a third grader, the Tennessean reported. Her family attended a memorial for the victims on Monday night at Woodmont Christian church. Her older sister, a fifth grader, broke down in tears.

"I don't want to be an only child," she said.

China warns of retaliation if Taiwan's president meets US House speaker during visit

Helen Davidson and Chi Hui Lin in Taipei

The Chinese government has threatened retaliation if Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, meets the US House speaker this week, and urged the US not to let her transit through the country, saying it would be a "provocation".

Tsai left Taiwan on Wednesday afternoon for a 10-day trip to visit Central American allies, Belize and Guatemala. The trip includes two stopovers, in New York on the way in, and Los Angeles on the way out. Tsai is expected to meet with the speaker, Kevin McCarthy in California, but there hasn't been official confirmation.

Just hours before Tsai was due to leave Taipei, China's Taiwan Affairs Office issued a warning against the trip.

"If she contacts US House speaker McCarthy, it will be another provocation that seriously violates the one-China principle, harms China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and destroys peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," Zhu Fenglian, the office's spokesperson told a news conference.

"We firmly oppose this and will definitely take measures to resolutely fight back."

The one-China principle is a domestic Chinese edict which makes clear the government's claim over Taiwan.

▲ China has warned that a meeting between Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen and US speaker Kevin McCarthy would be seen as a 'provocation'. Photograph: Ann Wang/Reuters

Shortly before her departure on Wednesday, Tsai told media external pressure would not stop Taiwan from engaging with the world.

"Taiwan's determination to go to the world will only become stronger and stronger," she said. "We are calm, confident, unyielding, and non-provocative."

Speaking at Taoyuan airport where she was joined by the ambassadors of Guatemala and Belize, Tsai said Taiwan would defend the values of freedom and democracy.

"When the international community needs Taiwan, Taiwan will contribute. And if Taiwan encounters difficulties, partners will also support Taiwan."

Taiwan's foreign minister, Joseph Wu tweeted a photo from inside the plane before take-off.

"I'm excited to accompany [Tsai] again in a trip to visit our allies Guatemala & Belize. Heard that it's very warm there, weather or otherwise."

Beijing intends to annex Taiwan under what it terms "reunification". Taiwan's democratically elected government and a large majority of its people reject the prospect of Chinese rule.

The US does not recognise Taiwan as a country but is a strong supporter of its efforts to resist Beijing's increasing efforts at military intimidation and diplomatic coercion.

The US government had said Tsai's stopover – her sixth through the US since becoming president in 2016 – was "normal" and warned Beijing not to use it as a pretext for aggressive behaviour. In August last year, in response to a visit to Taipei by then US speaker Nancy Pelosi, China's People's Liberation Army surrounded Taiwan's main island with days of live-fire drills, disrupting sea and air traffic.

Pelosi's successor, Republican Kevin McCarthy, had said he would like to visit Taiwan, but a meeting with Tsai in California has been interpreted by observers as an attempt to avoid a repeat of the Pelosi visit.

A US official said that a McCarthy meeting with Tsai would not signal any escalation from the US side.

"Members of Congress have met with the Taiwan president on nearly every transit" by Taiwanese leaders in the past, the official said.

Israel's Netanyahu rejects Biden's call to 'walk away' from judicial overhaul

Staff and agencies

Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed Joe Biden's call to "walk away" from a proposed judicial overhaul that has led to massive protests across Israel, with the Israeli prime minister responding that he does not make decisions based on pressure from abroad.

Netanyahu on Monday delayed the proposal after large numbers of people spilled into the streets. The White House initially suggested Netanyahu should seek a compromise but the US president went further in taking questions from reporters on Tuesday. "I hope he walks away from it," Biden said.

"Like many strong supporters of Israel I'm very concerned … They cannot continue down this road, and I've sort of made that clear," Biden told reporters during a visit to North Carolina.

"Hopefully the prime minister [Netanyahu] will act in a way that he will try to work out some genuine compromise, but that remains to be seen," Biden said, adding he was not considering inviting the Israeli leader to the White House, at least "not in the near term". Previously, the US ambassador to Israel, Tom Nides, told local radio that Netanyahu was expected to be invited "as soon as their schedules can be coordinated".

Netanyahu quickly issued a statement in response: "Israel is a sovereign country which makes its decisions by the will of its people and not based on pressures from abroad, including from the best of friends.

"I have known President Biden for over 40 years, and I appreciate his longstanding commitment to Israel," Netanyahu said. He said the Israel-US alliance was unbreakable "and always overcomes the occasional disagreements between us".

"My administration is committed to strengthening democracy by restoring the proper balance between the three branches of government, which we are striving to achieve via a broad consensus."

On Tuesday evening, Israel's far-right government and opposition parties held a first meeting on the judiciary proposals. "After about an hour-and-a-half, the meeting, which took place in a positive spirit, came to an end," President Isaac Herzog's office said late Tuesday. "Tomorrow, President Isaac Herzog will continue the series of meetings," it added.

It comes amid scenes of chaos in Israeli politics, with questions over whether Yoav Gallant, the defence minister fired by Netanyahu, is refusing to step down and concerns the prime minister may have promised too much to far-right politicians in exchange for a deal aimed at quelling nationwide

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demonstrations.

Netanyahu dismissed Gallant for breaking ranks and openly calling for a halt to the overhaul. However, aides to Gallant said he would remain in his post, asserting he had never been formally notified. Spokespeople for Netanyahu and his party, Likud, made no immediate comment.

Amid a surge in protests, Netanyahu announced in a speech on Monday a delay to his proposals, saying he wanted time to seek a compromise with political opponents. The move temporarily placated seething anger, with the main labour union calling off its strike after his speech and Israeli streets mostly quiet on Tuesday.

The speech ended a tense day in which hospitals, universities, seaports and the international airport in effect shut down in protest at the judicial changes, which many see as a neutering of judges' power to hold the government to account. Late in the day, government supporters assaulted television crews and Arab people.

▲ *Israeli flags are waved during a protest on Tuesday against plans by prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to overhaul the judicial system. Joe Biden has urged him to walk away from the plans. Photograph: Ariel Schalit/AP*

Nides told local radio on Tuesday he welcomed the move to delay the bill, joking that after the speech he "had a nice night of sleep".

Later on Tuesday, questions were being raised over Netanyahu's control over and credibility within his governing coalition, which includes a mixture of rightwing nationalists, religious leaders and far-right figures.

Netanyahu managed to pacify the national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, the most ardent supporter of the judicial reform bill from the far-right Jewish Power party, only by agreeing to the formation of a "national guard" under Ben-Gvir's control.

While there were questions over whether Netanyahu had made an empty promise, critics decried plans for what they described as a militia. "The prime minister has bribed the extreme right via a promise to create a militia that would endanger Israeli citizens – particularly the anti-coup protesters – as long as his government survives," the left-leaning Haaretz newspaper wrote in an editorial. It called on Israelis to "keep up the pressure on Netanyahu until he scraps the coup".

Protest organisers have promised to continue to hold rallies.

With Oliver Holmes and Reuters

Ultramassive black hole discovered by UK astronomers

PA Media

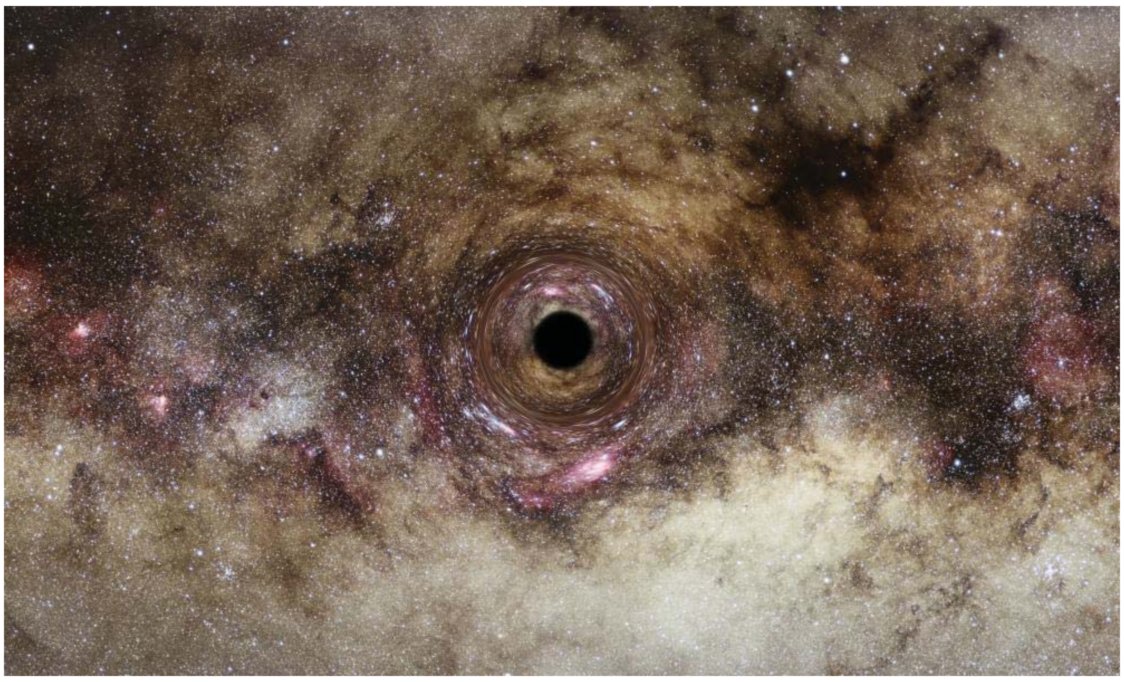
An ultramassive black hole about 30bn times the mass of the Sun has been discovered by astronomers in the UK.

Scientists at Durham University said the gargantuan black hole was one of the biggest ever found. The team described their findings, published in the journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, as "extremely exciting".

The paper's lead author, Dr James Nightingale, of the university's physics department, said: "This particular black hole, which is roughly 30bn times the mass of our Sun, is one of the biggest ever detected and on the upper limit of how large we believe black holes can theoretically become, so it is an extremely exciting discovery."

Ultramassive black holes are the most massive objects in the universe, at between 10bn and 40bn times the mass of the Sun. Astronomers believe they can be found at the centre of all large galaxies, such as the Milky Way.

Ultramassive black holes are rare and elusive, and their origins are unclear. Some believe they were formed from the extreme merger of massive galaxies billions of years ago when the universe was still young.



▲ *An artist's impression of a black hole in the Milky Way galaxy. Photograph: ESA/Hubble/PA*

The researchers used a phenomenon known as gravitational lensing, in which a nearby galaxy acted as a giant magnifying glass. This revealed the presence of the black hole, a region where gravity's pull is so powerful that not even light can escape.

The scientists used supercomputer simulations at the university and images captured by the Hubble space telescope to confirm its size.

They said it was the first black hole found using gravitational lensing. "Most of the biggest black holes that we know about are in an active state, where matter pulled in close to the black hole heats up and releases energy in the form of light, X-rays and other radiation," Dr Nightingale said.

"However, gravitational lensing makes it possible to study inactive black holes, something not currently possible in distant galaxies. This approach could let us detect many more black holes beyond our local universe and reveal how these exotic objects evolved further back in cosmic time."

The researchers said their work opened up the "tantalising possibility" that astronomers could discover more ultramassive black holes than previously thought.

The research was supported by the UK Space Agency, the Royal Society, the Science and Technology Facilities Council, part of UK Research and Innovation, and the European Research Council.

Adidas backtracks on opposition to Black Lives Matter trademark request

Mark Sweney

Adidas has withdrawn a request to US authorities to block the Black Lives Matter movement from trademarking a design featuring three parallel stripes.

The German sportswear company had said in a filing on Monday that the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation design would create confusion with the famous branding

▲ *The Adidas logo alongside the one for the Black Lives Matter movement. Composite: AP/Black Lives Matter*

Adidas had been using for more than 70 years.

However, on Wednesday Adidas made an abrupt U-turn, dropping its opposition to the BLMGNF trademark application.

"Adidas will withdraw its opposition to the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation's trademark application as soon as possible," a spokesperson said, without offering an explanation for the decision.

A source close to the company told Reuters the U-turn was prompted by fears people could misinterpret the objection as criticism of BLMGNF's mission. The group was founded after the unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin was shot by the neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman in 2012 and rose to prominence during the global movement of protests that followed the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer in 2020.

In November 2020, BLMGNF applied for a US trademark for a yellow three-stripe design, which it said could be for use on branded merchandise such as clothing, publications, bags, bracelets and mugs.

In Monday's notice of opposition submitted to the trademark office, Adidas said the proposed BLMGNF design "incorporates three stripes in a manner that is confusingly similar to

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the three-stripe mark in appearance and overall commercial impression".

The German manufacturer said it had used its three-stripe logo from as early as 1952, and that the design had since gained "international fame and tremendous public recognition".

The company added that consumers familiar with its goods and services "are likely to assume" that those offered under the applicant's mark "originate from the same source, or that they are affiliated, connected, or associated with or sponsored by Adidas".

Adidas has filed more than 90 lawsuits and signed more than 200 settlement agreements related to the three-stripe trademark since 2008.

In January, a New York jury found that the luxury designer Thom Browne's stripe patterns did not violate Adidas's trademark rights.

Adidas is struggling financially after warning last month that it could take a revenue hit of €1.2bn (£1bn) and slump to a loss this year if it decides not to sell its remaining stock of products made in collaboration with Kanye West, having cut ties with the rapper over his antisemitic comments.

The company said its decision last year to end the partnership to produce the Yeezy range with West, now known as Ye, will hit operating profits by €500m in 2023.

Adidas said it was still deciding whether it should "repurpose" any of the Yeezy products for sale. The company said that if it decided to scrap all the stock then it would take a further €500m hit to operating profits.

US puts Italy-sized chunk of Gulf of Mexico up for auction for oil drilling

Oliver Milman

An enormous swathe of the Gulf of Mexico, spanning an area the size of Italy, was put up for auction on Wednesday for oil and gas drilling, in the latest blow to Joe Biden's increasingly frayed reputation on dealing with the climate crisis.

The president's Department of the Interior offered up a vast area of the central and western Gulf, including plunging deep water reaches, for drilling projects that will stretch out over decades, despite scientists' urgent warnings that fossil fuels must be rapidly phased out if the world is to avoid disastrous global heating. The auctions also come despite Biden's own pre-election promise to halt all drilling on federal lands and waters.

A total of 313 tracts of ocean, spanning 1.6m acres, received high bids during the auction, the administration announced on Wednesday afternoon. There were 32 fossil fuel companies involved in the auction, collectively bidding $309.7m for drilling rights. The amount offered by the federal government was much larger than this, however. The bids will be evaluated by the government in the coming months before leases are issued.

In all, 73.3m acres (30m hectares), an area roughly the size of Italy, was made available to drilling companies, less than a month before the 13th anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. The sale, known as lease 259, had the potential to extract more than 1bn barrels of oil and 4.4tn cubic feet of gas over the next 50 years, according to the US federal government.

The auctions come just two weeks after Biden's administration approved the controversial Willow project, a drilling endeavor in the remote tundra of Alaska's arctic that will remove more than 600m barrels of oil over its lifetime, and the two actions have caused major alarm among those in favor of a livable climate, including Biden's usual allies.

▲ *A man fishes near docked oil drilling platforms in Port Aransas, Texas. Photograph: Eric Gay/AP*

"For the first half of his presidency, Joe Biden led on climate with transformative vision but in the second half he seems to be signaling a disastrous climate U-turn," Ben Jealous, executive director of the Sierra Club and a prominent progressive, said.

Last summer, Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (or IRA), a landmark bill that the president lauded as the "biggest step forward on climate ever". The sweeping legislation has billions of dollars in support for renewable energy projects and electric car subsidies, but it also included stipulations that large areas of the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska be made available for fossil fuel drilling in order to appease Joe Manchin, a pro-coal Democratic senator and key swing vote.

Climate campaigners mostly considered the trade-off to be worthwhile as the resulting emissions cuts should still be large, but the new glut of drilling could wipe out much of the benefits of wind and solar projects over the next decade.

"If this continues, all of the good Biden has done for the future will be undone by Biden himself," said Jealous.

"If he's making a political calculation, he's making a wrong one. He's breaking a major promise on drilling and by going back on his word he will inspire many young people to stay at home rather than voting in 2024. His decisions appear to be rooted in the political and economic calculus of the last century, not this one."

The White House has pointed to a series of complicating factors to its climate agenda, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has sped up the construction of oil and gas export terminals in the US, bound for European allies, as well as a closely divided Congress and various legal obstacles.

On Friday, Biden said that he was inclined to block the Willow project, only to be told by administration lawyers that ConocoPhillips, the owner of the project lease, would likely sue and win to secure it. "My strong inclination was to disapprove of it across the board but the advice I got from counsel was that if that were the case, I may very well lose," the president said.

The administration has also indicated that the terms of the Inflation Reduction Act also compel the Gulf of Mexico sales, although opponents argue that such a large area did not need to be put up for sale.

A separate, even larger, tract of the gulf, known as lease 257, has been enmeshed in a legal battle and the latest lease blocks will also likely end up in court, with a coalition of green groups suing this month to stop it. It's not been clear how much interest there will be from industry – an auction of leases in December for the Cook Inlet in Alaska yielded just one bid.

"These leases were brought back to life by the IRA but there was no legal reason to offer almost the entire Gulf of Mexico to the oil and gas industry," said George Torgun, an attorney at Earthjustice, which claims the drilling, aside from its climate impacts, will further burden communities of color who live beside polluting refineries along the coast and endanger the Rice's whale, a species endemic to the gulf with fewer than 50 individuals remaining.

"This is locking in decades of fossil fuel use when we should be heading in another direction," said Torgun. "It's out of step with what Biden himself has called the existential threat of climate change."

The department of interior's bureau of ocean energy management, which is overseeing the lease sales, did not respond to a request for comment. The National Ocean Industries Association, a lobby group for offshore drillers, has said that allowing the leases provides a "key component of a national energy strategy that will ensure Americans can continue to have access to fundamental domestic energy that is produced safely, sustainably, and responsibly".

The Earth's climate system is uncompromising, however. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warned that 3 billion people around the world are already suffering from severe climate impacts and that the world's temperature will likely rise beyond 1.5C, unleashing much worse misery, within a decade if fossil fuels aren't radically pared back.

"The truth is Earth doesn't care about politics, it cares about greenhouse gases in atmosphere," said Alex Ruane, a Nasa climate scientist and lead IPCC author.

"Even since the last IPCC report in 2021 we have put a substantial chunk of the carbon budget into the atmosphere. Action and inaction are both choices and at present we are getting closer every day to those temperature targets."

'They're killing us': anger grows after deadly fire at Mexican migrant center

Marisol Chávez in Ciudad Juárez

A loud voice cut through the thick quiet of the night: "*¡Justicia! ¡Justicia! ¡Justicia!*" Frark Martín Pérez Pérez, 32, chanted angrily, and hundreds followed.

Justice is what the crowd of about 400 migrants from Latin America gathered to protest about on Tuesday outside the migrant processing centre in Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city on the US border, where at least 40 were killed in a fire on Monday night.

Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, blamed protesting migrants for causing the fire. Security footage published by El Universal showed two immigration agents leaving the scene after the fire began, while detainees were locked up and unable to escape the flames.

López Obrador on Wednesday vowed to bring to justice whoever was responsible for the deaths. An investigation is underway to determine what happened at the center, which he said employed staff from the government's National Migration Institute (INM) as well as personnel from a private contractor.

"There'll be no attempt to hide the facts, no attempt to cover for anyone," the president said.

Rights groups have frequently flagged concerns about poor conditions and overcrowding in detention centres as the US and Mexico attempt to cope with record levels of crossings at their shared border.

The fire has highlighted the increasingly tough immigration policies that have been put in place by Joe Biden's administration. Limits on the number of people allowed to seek asylum have left cities along Mexico's northern border overwhelmed with people want-

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ing to cross into the US, including many forced to sleep on the streets, inside churches or packed shelters.

Dozens of white daisies, rosaries, banners, and photographs decorated the metal fence that separated the centre from protesters. One by one, the national anthems of the countries of the victims were sung.

"In honour and grief of the fallen, they're the martyrs of the immigrant population. We cannot forget them," said Juan Pavón, 55, a migrant from San Cristóbal, Venezuela, who attended the protest with his two teenage daughters.

Pavón and his daughters are homeless and awaiting the opportunity to request an inspection appointment with US Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

"We don't know if they're dead. They're friends we met on this journey, family after all we went through," said Pérez Pérez, a Venezuelan who emigrated from Perú in search of a better future for his wife and five children.

He was the only one of his friends not at the detention centre when the fire occurred, because he had run away when immigration authorities detained a group that was cleaning car windscreens at a busy intersection.

More than 24 hours after the incident, the victims' names have not been revealed by authorities. Many, like Pérez Pérez, still wonder if their friends and family are among the dead or injured.

"Justice!" the crowd chanted after each name during a roll-call. Not knowing the victims' names, a list of all the people detained at the time of the incident was read.

▲ *A vigil outside the immigration facility where at least 40 migrants died in a fire, in Ciudad Juárez, on Tuesday. Photograph: Guillermo Arias/AFP/Getty Images*

The protest remained peaceful, many sat on the street, closed off by local authorities to prevent the flow of traffic.

Xenophobia and abuse from Mexican authorities were a complaint throughout the day. Some of those detained on Monday claimed they were forcibly taken off the streets, without an explanation.

"What is the crime we committed?" said Katiuska Marquez, 23, from Estado Miranda, Venezuela. "They kept telling us this wasn't our country, and that we weren't allowed to do what we were doing."

Marquez and her brother, Orlando Maldonado, 30, were asking drivers for money at an intersection when authorities detained them.

Marquez was released on Monday afternoon, shortly after being detained, because she has a toddler, and no children are allowed in the building. Her brother was inside when the fire happened. She still doesn't know if he is alive.

"They're killing us, but they're also killing us psychologically," said Elerith Medina, 31, from Cumana, Venezuela. "There's immigrant children who have been detained more times than any criminal."

Medina described her experience with the Mexican immigration system as "torture," and called for President Biden to rethink immigration policies.

"I ask him for compassion," Medina said. "There are many mothers who are being given appointments, but they're not allowed to enter the country with their children."

Frustration over appointments through the US's CBP One app was high. The app is meant to serve as a one-stop shop portal for migrants with services and appointments tailored to their needs. However, its limitations mean families are unable to schedule appointments together and are forced to separate.

During the protest, the crowd cheered after Pavón suggested the app be disabled, and a better platform created. "That website is playing tricks with our minds," Pavón said. "It must be suspended, cancelled."

Many of the protesters planned to set up camp and stay the night outside the processing centre, saying they would remain peacefully until authorities from the US and Mexico gave them answers.

"Even though we're a multitude, we're still afraid," said Sofía García, 29, from Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, who joined the protest.

García has been in Juarez for two weeks awaiting her inspection appointment with CBP, and says some locals have welcomed her, but she's still faced discrimination.

"Why are we being asked to stay in this country to work and fight if we don't have freedom?" García said. "I'd rather go back with nothing but alive."

Reuters contributed reporting

Gwyneth Paltrow trial: plaintiff's loss of joy claim at odds with his travel pictures

Edward Helmore and agencies

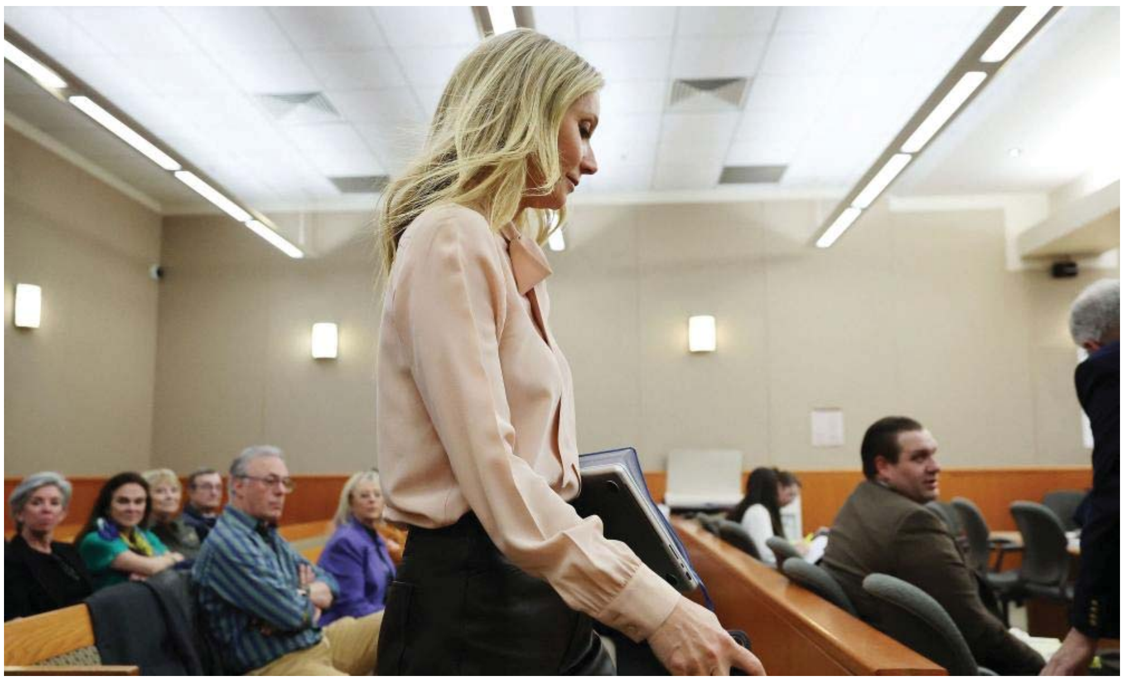
Gwyneth Paltrow's attorneys called ski crash accuser Terry Sanderson back to the stand late on Wednesday in a final effort to eviscerate claims that he suffered an extensive brain injury that led to loss of joie de vivre and brain function as a result of the actress allegedly skiing into him on a Utah mountain slope.

Under an intense grilling, Sanderson was shown photographs, culled from Facebook, showing the retired eye doctor taking frequent holiday trips around the world after the ski collision, including floating down the Amazon, visiting the Netherlands three times, Morocco twice, Thailand and other destinations.

Sanderson said the happiness he appeared to show in the holiday pictures was "reflexive", and he maintained he had not deliberately insulted Paltrow when he referred to her as "King Kong" and "Godzilla". He said it had been "difficult" to sue a celebrity but he did not regret it.

"I felt like I was seriously injured and had so many insults added to that," he said, alleging that his claims had been ignored by the actress. "This is obviously an issue that somebody has to be held accountable for. If they're never held accountable, obviously they're going to do it again."

Paltrow's attorneys have contended that Sanderson's claims that she crashed into him are "utter BS". On cross-examination, Paltrow attorney Steven Owens pointed out that the uncomfortable public exposure Sanderson said he had experienced during the trial was his own doing.



▲ *Gwyneth Paltrow in court on Tuesday. The judge said he wanted Paltrow's defence to rest by Thursday afternoon to give jurors time to deliberate. Photograph: Jeffrey D Allred/AFP/Getty*

"Do you realize that you are the reason your life has been exposed to the world?" he asked.

Sanderson replied: "I'm realizing that now, yes."

Earlier, a neurologist called by Paltrow's attorneys testified that the man the actor and lifestyle entrepreneur collided with in 2016 showed "no evidence of post-traumatic brain injury" in scans taken before or after the incident.

Where there were "anomalies" in Terry Sanderson's brain, Dr Carl Black said, they "pre-date the accident and go back to 2009".

His testimony contradicted the prosecution's claims that being skied into by Paltrow left Sanderson, 76 and a retired optometrist, with a serious brain injury.

On the seventh day of the trial, attorneys for Paltrow continued to rely mostly on experts to mount their defence.

Another witness, the neurologist Dr Robert Hoesch, suggested Sanderson may have "dementia". He testified that Sanderson would have recovered from a simple concussion if he had sustained one in the crash.

"If he had a concussion, it was very mild," Hoesch said, adding that underlying depression and anxiety Sanderson has described could exist as a result of natural, age-related brain deterioration, even if he had not crashed into Paltrow seven years ago.

"The cure for this is the end of this lawsuit," Hoesch told Paltrow's lawyer. "Suing somebody, going through a trial, a trial that has national recognition, can bring on a lot of anxiety," he added.

The judge, Kent Holmberg, had made it clear he wanted Paltrow's defence to rest by Thursday afternoon, to give the jury enough time to deliberate and come to a verdict.

That produced a rush of 12 experts, collectively attempting to show jurors the collision could not have been Paltrow's fault and that she is not responsible for Sanderson's symptoms.

Sanderson is asking for more than $300,000, alleging Paltrow's recklessness caused the crash, leaving him with four broken ribs and years of post-concussion symptoms including confusion, memory loss and irritability.

Paltrow has counter-sued for a symbolic $1 and attorney fees, alleging Sanderson hit her from behind.

Earlier this week, the court heard from Paltrow's daughter, 18-year-old Apple Martin, who said she was skiing ahead of her mother and didn't see the crash but learned of it when her mother was 10 minutes late for lunch and had explained that another skier ran into her.

"She came in and she looked a bit

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shocked. She said this a-hole ran into me, right into my back. She did this motion showing how it happened," she said.

Martin said her mother was "frantic" and "in a state of shock" and decided to take the rest of the day off from the slopes.

"I never see her really shaken up like that," she said. "She was clearly, visibly upset and she was in a little bit of pain. That's why she went to the spa to get a massage."

Apple Martin's brother, Moses Martin, 16, said he saw the collision and his mother had been on the snow for two minutes before getting up.

"I stood there wondering what was going on and then I remember after we went to eat lunch," he said. Moses, who was nine at the time, recalled that at lunch his mom said "she got hit or ran into".

Paltrow's children had been expected to testify in person but the trial, in its second week, is running out of time.

Nonetheless, the defence left the door open to call Paltrow or Brad Falchuk, her television producer husband.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

Twitter to no longer only promote paid-for accounts after backlash

Alex Hern UK technology editor

Twitter has reversed course on plans to limit presence on its "for you" timeline to paying users only, with Elon Musk claiming he "forgot to mention" that other users would be visible as well.

When the company's owner first announced the plan on Tuesday he said it would limit the tab that algorithmically curates tweets for users to only display accounts who had paid £8 a month for "Twitter Blue" and linked their account to a working phone number.

Musk said restricting it to those subscribers, who will be the only "verified" users on the site after Twitter closes its "legacy" verification program on Saturday, was "the only realistic way to address advanced AI bot swarms taking over".

The announcement was met with a backlash from many users, however, and later that day Musk said in a second tweet: "Forgot to mention that accounts you follow directly will also be in For You, since you have explicitly asked for them."

▲ *Since its launch under Elon Musk, as a rebranded version of the pre-existing 'recommended' feed, Twitter's 'for you' tab has proved controversial. Photograph: Michael Dwyer/AP*

Since its launch under Musk, as a rebranded version of the pre-existing "recommended" feed, the for you tab has proved controversial. It is more aggressively curated than its predecessor, regularly inserting tweets from accounts the user does not follow, and has a noted predilection for pushing tweets from a small number of prominent accounts into as many feeds as possible: such as Menswear commentator @dieworkwear, conservative commentator Ben Shapiro and almost every public post from Musk himself.

The stated rationale for limiting the for you tab to paid accounts only was to prevent "bot swarms" from dominating it. Musk has been focused on the prominence of automated spam accounts since before he even bought the site, citing spam as one of the key reasons why he wanted to acquire it, and later citing the same spam as one of the reasons he should be allowed to renege on the deal.

However, his focus stepped into a higher gear in late December, after he posted a "binding" poll to ask whether he should step down as the head of the company. Within 24 hours, more than 10 million users had voted in favour of him resigning, 57.5% of the overall votes.

The following day, Musk broke his silence only to tweet the word "interesting" to several suggestions that the results of the poll were skewed by fake accounts, and to agree with a suggestion that only paid-for accounts should be able to vote in polls. That policy is on track to be introduced on 15 April, Musk said in a tweet on Tuesday.

Musk has yet to confirm any plans to step down as head of the company.

US environmental agency to conduct internal inquiry over Ohio train wreck

Tom Perkins

The US Environmental Protection Agency's internal watchdog division is opening an investigation into the handling of the East Palestine train wreck which caused a toxic disaster in the small Ohio town.

An agency spokesperson declined to comment on why it is launching the investigation, but a public memo from the EPA office of inspector general states that it will "conduct interviews, gather data, and analyze a variety of issues, including hazardous waste disposal, air and water monitoring, soil and sediment sampling, and risk communication".

The agency's response to the train crash has drawn intense criticism from the town's residents and public health advocates who say it has failed to fully protect East Palestine from toxic chemicals released from train cars and a controlled burn of vinyl chloride in the days after the wreck.

Critics say the Joe Biden administration has not been cautious enough in its approach, or taken strong enough action against Norfolk Southern, the rail company behind the disaster. Much

▲ *Destroyed rail cars in the aftermath of the derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, seen on 19 February 2023. Photograph: Tannen Maury/EPA*

of the ire over the management of the toxic wreck's aftermath was directed at the EPA, and rightwing pundits and politicians have politicized and racialized the controversy.

Public health advocates praised the announcement of the inspector general's involvement, and the investigation is "warranted", said Kyla Bennett, a former EPA scientist now with the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility non-profit.

"There are too many unanswered questions and conflicting information," she said. "The IG can get to the bottom of how decisions were made to conduct testing the way they were and whether that was sufficient."

The EPA's inspector general has issued reports critical of the agency over what it has found to be a mishandling of controversies in recent years.

Chemical pollution experts and residents have consistently questioned whether the EPA took a robust enough approach to testing water, soil and air in the days and weeks after the wreck and controlled burn.

Residents said they were concerned the EPA told them it was safe to return home too soon just days after the burn. Many had questions about air quality, especially indoors, and received conflicting messaging from state and federal officials about how to protect themselves.

Meanwhile, the contractor hired by Norfolk Southern to test indoor air quality has links to the industry and residents told the Guardian they did not trust the results because the testing was not conducted by an independent entity.

"Putting the fox in charge of the henhouse is never a good idea," Bennett said.

The controlled burn likely created dangerous compounds such as dioxins and chlorinated PAHs that could pose a long-term health threat in the East Palestine area and downwind. The EPA

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for weeks resisted a chorus of calls from chemical pollution experts and residents to test for the dangerous compounds.

After the EPA agreed to require Norfolk Southern to test for dioxins, an initial round of sampling found East Palestine soil to contain levels hundreds of times greater than the exposure threshold above which EPA scientists in 2010 found poses cancer risks.

Still, EPA leadership has told Congress the dioxin levels are "very low" and the agency has not taken any additional steps. It remains unclear if environmental officials ever tested for chlorinated PAHs, or PFAS, another toxic substance likely in the ground and water around the site.

The EPA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Residents in East Palestine still say they are getting rashes and their lungs are irritated, said Amanda Kiger, director of Ohio River Valley Organizing, which has been advocating for residents on the ground. Frustration is also aimed at Ohio governor Mike DeWine's administration's environmental agency, she added.

Residents have said financial assistance offered by Norfolk Southern is not enough, and the federal government should be providing more relief, or forcing the rail company to put more towards assistance.

"They're not doing their job and everyone knows it," Kiger said. "For lack of a better term, it's all a clusterfuck, but I'm hoping it's a good investigation, and thorough."

Aide to Senator Rand Paul critically wounded in Washington DC stabbing

Edward Helmore

A member of Senator Rand Paul's staff was stabbed and critically wounded in Washington on Saturday in an attack that is likely to raise fears about violence in the nation's capital.

"This past weekend a member of my staff was brutally attacked in broad daylight in Washington DC," the Kentucky senator said in a statement to ABC News late Monday. "I ask you to join [wife] Kelley and me in praying for a speedy and complete recovery, and thanking the first responders, hospital staff, and police for their diligent actions" after the stabbing.

According to a police report obtained by the outlet, officers responded at about 5.15pm to a call about a stabbing fewer than two miles north-east of the US Capitol.

The victim, who has not been named, was treated on the scene for "stab wounds" and was seen by a witness "bleeding from the head", and was later hospitalized for "treatment of life-threatening injuries", the report states.

▲ *Rand Paul thanked first responders, hospital staff and police and said he was 'praying for a speedy and complete recovery'. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images*

A suspect is reported to have been taken into custody and is being held without bail.

On Monday, DC police said that 42-year-old local resident Glynn Neal was arrested in connection with the attack on counts of assault with intent to kill and wielding a knife. Neal reportedly told police officers a voice had threatened to get him before the attack occurred.

According to one of two witnesses cited in the police report, the suspect had "popped out of the corner" and stabbed the Paul staffer multiple times.

The victim "was able to grab [the suspect's] arms" and the witness with him tackled the suspect, "leading to a struggle between the parties". The victim and the witness ran as the suspect fled, the report added.

"We are relieved to hear the suspect has been arrested," Paul's statement said. "At this time we would ask for privacy so everyone can focus on healing and recovery".

Nashville victims: three nine-year-olds and school head among six shot dead

J Oliver Conroy

Three nine-year-old children and three adults arrived at the Covenant School, a small, private Christian academy in Nashville, Tennessee, on Monday for what appeared to be a normal day of school.

Before noon, all six had been killed – the victims of a shooter who terrorized the school with multiple firearms before being shot dead by police.

The alleged perpetrator, Audrey E Hale, was a 28-year-old former student, police have said.

Mass shootings are shockingly common in America. The Nashville shooting was the 129th mass shooting in the US so far this year, according to the non-profit Gun Violence Archive, and the 13th school shooting this year that caused injuries or death, according to Education Week.

Here is what is known so far about the six fatal victims:

Evelyn Dieckhaus, nine, was a student in the third grade. At a vigil for the victims, according to the Tennessean, her two-years-older sister was seen crying and saying: "I don't want to be an only child."

▲ *People attend a vigil for those killed in a mass shooting at the Covenant School on Monday. Photograph: Seth Herald/Getty Images*

Hallie Scruggs, nine, was a student in the third grade and the daughter of Chad Scruggs, the senior pastor of Covenant Presbyterian church, the school's sponsor. His daughter was "such a gift", Scruggs said in a statement. "We are heartbroken … Through tears we trust that she is in the arms of Jesus, who will raise her to life once again."

William Kinney, nine, was a student at the Covenant school.

Katherine Koonce, 60, a native of Louisiana who held a doctorate in education, was the head of school since 2016. People saw her as a "remarkable woman" with a "bright spirit", according to ABC News. She was "strong and steady and hilarious" with an "amazing sense of humor", ABC quoted Sissy Goff as saying. "I can't imagine a better head of a school." A parent of two children at the school told the BBC that Koonce "did so much for those kids" and "now gave her life protecting them". She "knew every single student by name," the parent added. "She did everything to help them when families couldn't afford things, it didn't matter. She found ways for them to stay."

Michael "Mike" Hill, 61, had been a custodian at Covenant for more than 13 years. He saw the people there "as his family", ABC News reported. "Today my dad lost his life," his daughter wrote on Facebook, at a "job that everyone knows he absolutely loved. I have watched school shootings happen over the years and never thought I would lose a loved one over a person trying to solve a temporary problem with a permanent solution." Tim Dunavant, a Methodist pastor who told the BBC that he first hired Hill more than a decade earlier, said that he would miss Hill's "encouraging texts out of the blue" and that he would not be surprised if Hill had sacrificed himself to save others because "he's the kind of guy that would do that".

Cynthia Peak, 61, was a substitute teacher. She was raised in Leesville, Louisiana, according to KALB, and graduated from Texas Christian University. She had a husband and three children.

Mike Pence must testify before grand jury investigating January 6 – reports

Martin Pengelly in New York

Former US vice-president Mike Pence must testify in front of a grand jury investigating Donald Trump's election subversion and incitement of the January 6 attack on Congress, a federal judge reportedly ruled on Tuesday.

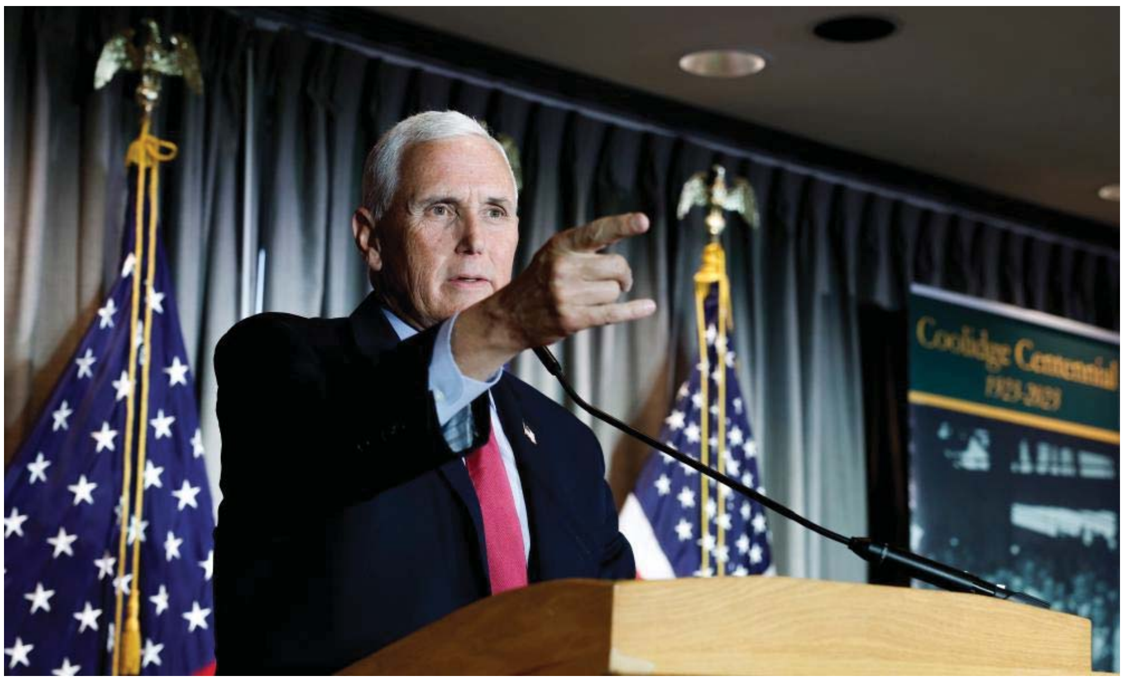
Multiple news outlets reported the ruling, which remained under seal.

Trump and Pence himself have both sought to stop Pence from testifying in the justice department investigation of Trump's attempt to overturn his defeat by Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election.

At issue are conversations between Pence and Trump leading up to January 6 and the attack on the Capitol, which is now linked to nine deaths, more than a thousand arrests and hundreds of convictions.

Lawyers for Trump cited executive privilege, the concept that communications between a president and aides are protected.

Lawyers for Pence argued he was protected by the separation of powers, via the vice-president's role as president of the Senate, which he performed on 6 January 2021, the day supporters who were told to "fight like hell" by Trump tried to block certification of Biden's win.



▲ *Pence gives remarks at a conference in Washington DC in February 2023. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images*

On Tuesday, James E Boasberg, a judge in federal district court in Washington DC, reportedly rejected both arguments.

Pence is not expected to have to answer questions about his own actions on 6 January 2021, when he was spirited away from a mob which chanted about hanging him while a makeshift gallows went up outside.

Pence has described that experience in a book, So Help Me God, published ahead of an expected run against Trump for the Republican presidential nomination. He has also criticised Trump's actions in public remarks. Trump has said the January 6 Capitol attack was Pence's fault.

On Tuesday, Pence was reportedly considering an appeal. Robert Costa, a CBS correspondent and co-author with Bob Woodward of the bestselling book Peril, about Trump's attempt to cling onto power, said: "Pence has said he might see this all the way to the supreme court."

The Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe has described Pence's defence as "meritless", saying: "Pence needn't file a foolish appeal just to prove his [pro-Trump] credentials. He's done enough in that regard. Now he needs to show he's law-abiding."

Reporting the ruling on Tuesday, the Associated Press said it set up the "extraordinary scenario of a former vice-president potentially testifying against his former boss in a criminal investigation".

Trump faces legal jeopardy on multiple fronts.

An indictment is expected in New York, over a hush money payment to an adult film actor. His attempted election subversion is under investigation in Georgia and at the federal level. Jack Smith, the special counsel appointed by the US attorney general, Merrick Garland, is also investigating Trump's retention of classified material.

Authorities in New York have mounted a civil suit over Trump's business affairs. In the same state, Trump also faces a defamation trial over an allegation of rape from the writer E Jean Carroll.

Trump denies all wrongdoing, claiming to be the victim of prosecutors motivated by political and racial animus.

He continues to lead polling regarding the Republican nomination for president.

Dominion wants Fox News hosts and executives to testify at trial

Sam Levine in New York

Dominion Voting Systems wants to call Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch, as well as some of Fox News's most well-known hosts, to testify in its $1.6bn defamation lawsuit.

Dominion also wants to call Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Lou Dobbs, Bret Baier, Maria Bartiromo, Jeanine Pirro and Dana Perino to testify at trial, according to a Monday filing first reported by CNN.

Eric Davis, the Delaware judge overseeing the case, suggested on Tuesday he could compel Rupert Murdoch, 92, to appear live in court.

Dominion also wants to call Abby Grossman, a former Fox News employee suing the network who says she was coerced into giving misleading testimony; Suzanne Scott, the Fox News chief executive; Raj Shah, a Fox Corporation executive; and Paul Ryan, the former US House speaker who serves on the company's board of directors.

Fox News said it wants to call Baier, Bartiromo, Dobbs, Hannity, Pirro, Perino and Scott as live witnesses.

▲ *Tucker Carlson in Hollywood, Florida, in November 2022. Photograph: Jason Koerner/Getty Images*

In a statement in response to the Dominion request, Fox said: "Dominion's needlessly expansive live witness list is yet another attempt to generate headlines and distract from the many shortcomings of its case.

"Ultimately, this case is about the first amendment protections of the media's absolute right to cover the news."

The jury trial, set to begin on 17 April, centers on whether Fox News knowingly broadcast false claims about Dominion equipment as Donald Trump and his allies sought to overturn the 2020 election.

Dominion has already produced stunning internal text messages showing Fox News employees were aware claims about Dominion rigging elections were false – and broadcast them anyway.

The case is being closely watched because of the extensive internal communications Dominion obtained from Fox News, in which employees bluntly and crudely call out the specious allegations about Dominion from Sidney Powell and Rudy Giuliani, two Trump advisers and lawyers.

It is seen as one of the most aggressive efforts to hold anyone accountable for spreading misinformation after the 2020 election.

Fox News attorneys argued at a pretrial hearing earlier this month the network was reporting on newsworthy allegations from Trump and his lawyers and that reasonable viewers would not have understood them to be factual statements.

They also argued that top executives being sued by Dominion were not directly involved in news coverage and so cannot be held liable.

In a Tuesday afternoon hearing, attorneys argued over a few pretrial administrative matters. An attorney for Dominion revealed that Fox News had objected to every exhibit it had proposed to use at trial.

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US court reinstates Adnan Syed murder conviction in Serial podcast case

Julia Carrie Wong

A court in Maryland has reinstated the murder conviction of Adnan Syed, the Baltimore man whose alleged involvement in the 1999 murder of 17-year-old Hae Min Lee was the subject of the hit podcast Serial.

Syed, 41, was convicted of murdering Lee in 2000 and sentenced to life in prison, though he always maintained his innocence. In September last year, state prosecutors revealed they had uncovered new evidence they said undermined Syed's conviction and pointed to two alternative suspects.

A circuit court judge then threw out Syed's conviction, saying that the state had failed to turn over exculpatory evidence with the defense. Prosecutors declined to recharge the case, entering what is known as a "nolle prosequi" in the court record.

In December, Young Lee, Hae Min's brother, filed an appeal arguing that prosecutors violated state law requiring them to give sufficient notice of hearings to victims or their representatives so they may attend in person.

▲ *Adnan Syed was freed in September last year after being convicted in 2000 over the murder of 17-year-old Hae Min Lee. Photograph: Jerry Jackson/AP*

In its ruling on Tuesday, the Maryland appeals court agreed with Lee that the state violated his rights by giving him just one business day's notice, and said "this court has the power and obligation to remedy those violations, as long we can do so without violating Mr Syed's right to be free from double jeopardy".

But the ruling also suggests Syed will not remain convicted for long and that the reinstatement will be temporary until the hearing is repeated.

The ruling orders "a new, legally compliant and transparent hearing on the motion to vacate, where Mr Lee is given notice of the hearing that is sufficient to allow him to attend in person, evidence supporting the motion to vacate is presented, and the court states its reasons in support of its decision".

Since being freed from prison, Syed has been hired at Georgetown University's Prisons and Justice Initiative, where he works on prison reform.

Jury to hear statements from Gwyneth Paltrow's children in Utah ski crash trial

Edward Helmore

Jurors in the Gwyneth Paltrow ski crash trial were expected to hear statements from her two teenage children on Tuesday as the proceeding approaches expected summations on Thursday.

Attorneys for Paltrow, 50, said depositions from 18-year-old Apple and 16-year-old Moses, would be read in court but they would not be called to give evidence in person as time began to run out on the eight-day trial's clock.

The case revolves around dueling "hit-and-run" claims on the slopes of the Deer Valley ski resort in February 2016.

In one, retired optometrist Terry Sanderson is suing Paltrow for $300,000, claiming Paltrow smashed into him and caused him "a brain injury, four broken ribs and other serious injuries" that left him with "pain, suffering, loss of enjoyment of life, emotional distress and disfigurement".

Sanderson has told the court: "There was nothing in front of me … I just remember everything was great, and then I heard something I've never heard at a ski resort. It was like somebody was out of control and hit a tree and was going to die, and that's what I had until I was hit."

Paltrow's counterclaim maintains it was Sanderson who crashed into her and seeks $1 plus legal costs.

In her testimony, Paltrow said she realized something was wrong when "two skis came between my skis forcing my legs apart and then a body pressed against me … My brain was trying to make sense of what is happening.

"I thought, 'Is this a practical joke? Is someone doing something perverted?' My mind was going very, very quickly, and my mind was trying to ascertain what happened."

As both sides attempt to prove they were not responsible for the collision, the court has also been shown animated accident reconstruction videos and has heard from Paltrow's ski instructor, medics and Deer Valley officials.

Biomechanical engineer Irving Scher, who described himself as a "skiologist" and had studied how bones break using cadavers, said on Tuesday that Sanderson could have fallen "to the ground without Gwyneth Paltrow falling on him and sustained the rib fractures".

Scher disputed testimony given by Sanderson's friend Craig Ramon, who claimed to have witnessed Paltrow "just slam into the back of Terry, very hard".

"She hits him right directly in the back," Ramon said. "His skis, the tips go out like this, and he falls face down kind of spread eagle."

But Scher cast doubt on this, saying: "Ms Paltrow's version of events are consistent with the laws of physics. Mr Ramon's version just doesn't fit."

But Eric Christiansen, a ski instructor hired for Paltrow's son, said he'd noticed Sanderson making "round, and large and fairly fast" turns across the width of the run before the crash.

▲ *Gwyneth Paltrow sits in court during an objection by her attorney during her trial, on Monday, in Park City, Utah. Photograph: Rick Bowmer/AP*

"That's what caught my eye," Christiansen said. "Mr Sanderson has some very strong skiing skills, because he was skiing edge to edge."

After hearing a scream, he said, he saw Paltrow and Sanderson's bodies and skis tangled up – "spooning", according to Paltrow.

"They were on the slope and she was underneath and he was on top of her," Christiansen said. "They both had their heads uphill, both sets of skis were still on both she and Mr Sanderson. … Their skis were below them. And they were basically lying, pretty much on their backs."

Christiansen, who was accused by Sanderson of being a "bully" and not helping him, told the court that "no one was unconscious", as Sanderson has claimed, and that the eye doctor had told him that Paltrow "just appeared in front of me".

Sanderson's attorney asked Deer Valley ski supervisor Steve Graff if Christiansen was covering up for Paltrow. Graff said he had no concerns about a report written about the crash.

Questioned on why he had sent his daughters an email titled "I'm famous" after the collision with the Hollywood star and lifestyle guru, Sanderson said "that wasn't him".

"It's the other personality that's inhabiting my body right now," he said.

Asked if he blamed Paltrow for that, Sanderson said: "Yes, no question."

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Florida school pulls anti-racism film Ruby Bridges after parent complaint

Edward Helmore

Disney's anti-racism film Ruby Bridges is the subject of a complaint brought by a Florida parent who claims the movie is not appropriate for second-graders, because it might teach them that "white people hate Black people".

The film, which tells the story of a six-year-old girl who integrated New Orleans schools in the 1960s, has been a staple of school curriculums during Black History Month in the state's Tampa-area county of Pinellas.

The complaint over the film about Ruby Bridges, the first Black child to integrate into a white school, comes as parents across Florida have been granted greater powers over what their children are shown and taught in classrooms, including being given advance warning over "controversial" topics.

It was reported last week that the principal of a school in Tallahassee, Florida, had been pressured to resign after an image of Michelangelo's David, which sits in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, was shown to a sixth-grade art class.

Earlier this year, a controversy erupted over Toni Morrison's novel The Bluest Eye, which includes a father-daughter rape scene, after a parent complained. Pinellas school officials withdrew the book and directed schools to "err on the side of caution" when selecting literature for students.

Emily Conklin, the North Shore elementary school parent who filed the instructional and media material objection to Ruby Bridges, cited several racial slurs in the film, including a scene where adults scream, "I'm going to hang you!"

▲ *Ruby Bridges, the 1998 made-for-TV movie. The film is based on the experiences of the author at William Frantz elementary school in New Orleans. Photograph: Michael Macor/AP*

The issue has been rumbling since early March, when Conklin said she would not allow her child to watch the film after the North Shore school sent out permission slips to parents. Two families opted to take their children out before a teacher showed the film to about 60 second-graders on 2 March.

In a formal complaint on 6 March, Conklin said the use of racist slurs and scenes of white people threatening Ruby as she entered a school could result in students learning that white people hate Black people. She said that the film was more appropriate for an eighth-grade American history class but not for children in the second grade.

School officials responded by suspending further showings of the film this year until a review committee had assessed "the challenged material". That prompted an outcry from a local group representing the interests of Black children.

"Many from historically marginalized communities are asking whether this so-called integrated education system in Pinellas county can even serve the diverse community fairly and equitably,"wrote Ric Davis, president of Concerned Organization for Quality Education for Black students, in a letter obtained by the Tampa Bay Times.

Davis said the political climate in Florida had educators second-guessing themselves about what materials to use in classes. He said: "The [Pinellas] district's leadership appears to fear the potential consequences of not acting in the way they have. He added he had "serious questions" about the administrators' judgment.

The former St Petersburg police chief and deputy mayor Goliath Davis also criticized the move to suspend Ruby Bridges showings. In a column published by the Weekly Challenger, he said that in both the Morrison and Bridges cases, the material had been removed on the basis of a single complaint.

"Think about it. A six-year-old girl can go to school every day with armed guards, but second-graders can't learn about it?" Davis said. "It doesn't make any sense."

Disney produced the made-for-TV Ruby Bridges movie, based on the experiences of the eponymous author at William Frantz elementary school in New Orleans, in 1998.

Bridges told the Florida Times-Union after it was broadcast: "I think it's important to look at this film to see what a six-year-old child had to go through, what a family went through just to be able to have the same privileges as everyone else. I think ideally that people will think about that and do everything they can not to pass prejudice on to their children."

In a recent interview with the Guardian, the Columbia University and UCLA law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw warned that an escalation in the battle over the teaching of racial history in Florida and elsewhere was "the tip of the iceberg" in rightwing efforts to reverse civil rights progress.

"The ban on anti-racism is so profound, that even the story of a kindergarten or first grade integrating an all-white school runs counter to [the new laws]," she said, referring to Bridges' memoir.

On Monday, the Florida Democratic congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz said the Ruby Bridges issue illustrated the state's attempts to "erase history".

"How can it be that a black child once needed police escorts to attend class," Wasserman Schultz wrote in a tweet, "yet students today must be shielded from this truth?"

Republican congressman says 'we're not going to fix' school shootings

Julia Carrie Wong

After the latest massacre of schoolchildren in the United States, the Republican congressman Tim Burchett answered the question Americans have all but given up asking of their elected officials by telling reporters: "We're not going to fix it."

The three-term congressman from Tennessee, the state where an intruder fatally shot three nine-year-old students and three adults at a small Christian school on Monday, appeared to compare the expectation of safety for American schoolchildren with that of soldiers fighting Japanese suicide attackers during the second world war.

"It's a horrible, horrible situation, and we're not going to fix it," Burchett said. "Criminals are gonna be criminals. And my daddy fought in the second world war, fought in the Pacific, fought the Japanese, and he told me, he said, 'Buddy,' he said, 'if somebody wants to take you out, and doesn't mind losing their life, there's not a whole heck of a lot you can do about it.'"

▲ *Tim Burchett in Washington DC in January. Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images*

Asked whether there was a role for Congress to play in preventing tragedies that are exceedingly common in the US while being exceedingly rare in the rest of the world, Burchett responded: "I don't see any real role that we could do other than mess things up, honestly … I don't think you're going to stop the gun violence. I think you got to change people's hearts. You know, as a Christian, as we talk about in the church, and I've said this many times, I think we really need a revival in this country."

Burchett, 58, has a reputation as "perhaps one of the least filtered members" of Congress, according to a recent profile in Politico that focused on his penchant for somewhat offbeat jokes.

His substantive track record is less distinct from his rightwing peers. Burchett was first elected to Congress in 2018, after two decades in the Tennessee state legislature and as mayor of Knox county. He describes himself as an "avid gun owner" and received an A rating from the National Rifle Association's political action committee, which noted his opposition to bans on semi-automatic weapons. The far-right Heritage Foundation rates his voting record at 95%, thanks in part to his opposition of a bipartisan gun control bill and universal background checks for gun purchases. He was also among 125 House Republicans to sign an amicus brief backing one of the efforts to overturn Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election.

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But Burchett has not always had such a laissez-faire attitude toward crime nor such a cynical attitude toward legislators' role.

In 2006, while serving in the Tennessee state legislature, he sponsored legislation to ban salvia divinorum, an herb with psychoactive properties. "It's not that popular," Burchett said of the drug at the time. "But I'm one of those who believes in closing the barn door before the cows get out.

"In certain hands, it could be very dangerous, even lethal."

In 2022, after voting against Democratic legislation to fund police departments, Burchett attributed a "violent crime spike" to "liberal soft-on-crime policies and the radical Defund the Police movement".

Burchett has introduced one piece of legislation related to public safety during his tenure in Congress: the 2019 "Unmasking Antifa Act". The bill sought to create "a new criminal civil rights violation for wearing a disguise while interfering with another person's exercise of a protected right or privilege". Had it passed, the bill would have punished people committing crimes while wearing masks with prison sentences of up to 15 years.

US senators grill banking regulators in first Silicon Valley Bank hearing

Lauren Aratani

Lawmakers grilled federal banking regulators on Tuesday over their "massive failure in supervision" during the first congressional hearing on the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank.

The Senate's banking committee is the first to question officials on federal oversight of SVB, which was taken over by the federal government earlier this month after a severe bank run depleted its reserve. The collapse of the bank – the biggest bank failure since the 2008 financial crisis – has sparked wider fears about the soundness of the banking sector.

Three financial regulators appeared in front of the committee: the Federal Reserve vice-chair for supervision, Michael Barr, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) chair, Martin Gruenberg, and the treasury's undersecretary for domestic financing Nellie Liang.

Two different framings were offered by Democrats and Republicans. Democrats emphasized the failure of the bank's management and deregulation, specifically pointing to the scaling-back of regulation of mid-sized banks under the Trump administration.

Sherrod Brown, the Democrat chair of the committee, pointed out that SVB execs were under pressure to grow the company, which led them to risky behavior.

▲ Michael Barr, the Federal Reserve board vice-chair for supervision, in Washington DC on 28 March. Photograph: Win McNamee/Getty Images

"It's all just a variation of the same theme, the same root cause of most of our economic problems: wealthy elites do anything to make a quick profit, to pocket the reward and when the risky behavior leads to catastrophic failures, they turn to the government asking for help," he said.

Elizabeth Warren, who was a key creator of financial regulations after the 2008 recession, asked the officials one by one if they agree that there should be a strengthening of banking rules.

"These collapses represent a massive failure in supervision over our nation's banks," she said. "Regulators burned down dozens of safeguards that were meant to stop banks from making risky bets."

Warren noted that the FDIC, under the Trump administration cut back on rules across the board, something that Gruenberg noted he voted against when he was on the FDIC's board at the time.

"I certainly think it's appropriate for us to go back and review those actions in light of the recent episode," Gruenberg said.

Republicans, meanwhile, say the regulators failed to act despite warning signs. Republican members tried to carefully balance criticizing regulators without promoting stronger regulation, which would typically go against the party's stance.

"The Federal Reserve should have been keenly aware of the impact interest rate hikes would have on the value of securities, and it should have been actively working to ensure the bank and supervisors were hedging their bets and covering their risk accordingly," said Tim Scott, the Republican ranking member of the committee.

Meanwhile, the regulators said they were well aware of the bank's problems and had delivered warnings starting in 2021 that SVB managers failed to act on.

Barr – who is heading the Fed's investigation in the SVB collapse that will be published by 1 May – took on a bulk of lawmakers' questions. Barr said the bank's rating was a three on the Camels rating system, which measures the strength of a bank on various measures like liquidity and assets on a scale of one to five, with one being the strongest and five being weak.

"The risks the bank faced, interest rate risk and liquidity risks, those are the bread and butter of banking issues. The firm was quite aware of those issues. They had been told by regulators, investors were talking about problems with interest rates and liquidity risks publicly, and they didn't take the necessary actions," Barr said.

Barr said the Fed did not stress-test SVB in 2022, saying that a stress test is not the primary way regulators test for interest rates. He noted that stress testing for rising interest rates would be useful in the future.

The Fed's investigation will "consider whether the supervisory warnings were sufficient and whether supervisors had sufficient tools", Barr said.

"We are evaluating whether application of more stringent standards would have prompted the bank to better manage the risks that led to its failure," Barr said. "Recent events have shown that we must evolve our understanding of banks, in light of changing technology and emerging risks."

Boris Johnson jokes he was given Partygate fine for 'eating lunch at his desk'

Rowena Mason Whitehall editor

Boris Johnson has made light of his police fine for the Partygate scandal during a speech in Nigeria, joking that he was criminalised for standing up and eating lunch at his desk for 20 minutes.

The former prime minister dismissed his fine from police for breaking Covid laws as "bizarre" at a conference in Lagos on "rehumanising human experience".

Johnson is currently awaiting the verdict of an inquiry by MPs into whether he misled the House of Commons when he said all Covid rules and guidance were followed in No 10.

His political career as an MP is at stake as the privileges committee could choose to recommend a suspension of more than 10 days if they find he did mislead parliament recklessly or deliberately, potentially triggering a byelection.

▲ Former prime minister Boris Johnson was fined in April 2022, in relation to an event in June 2020 for his birthday. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

However, he got laughs from the audience in Lagos for telling them: "A couple of years ago, the Met actually fined me, in circumstances I still find almost too painful to describe, simply for standing at my desk in the Cabinet room and eating lunch."

Johnson was actually fined less than a year ago in April 2022, in relation to an event in June 2020 for his birthday.

"For keen followers of British politics, I want you to know the fabled birthday cake remained unseen, by which the BBC and the rest of the media fulminated for most of the rest of the year, [by] me throughout that 20 minutes in its Tupperware box and was belatedly discovered and consumed by my private secretary."

He added: "Look on the bright side, can you imagine the Moscow police arresting Vladimir Putin for having lunch at his desk for 20 minutes? Can you imagine the Chinese police … Whatever else it shows, that decision, which may seem to me to be bizarre, it shows to me the law is in force in my country without fear or favour."

Despite now calling it "bizarre", at the time, Johnson apologised, saying: "I have paid the fine and I once again offer a full apology." He also said at the time that he "now humbly accepts" he did breach Covid laws.

Johnson appears to have become more defiant about the Partygate scandal since leaving office, despite police issuing more than 170 fines for breaches of the rules in No 10 under his watch.

He told the privileges committee that it was "nonsense, complete nonsense" that he had not sought the proper assurances that rules were followed in No 10 before telling MPs that this was the case.

There have been persistent rumours that the former prime minister would like to stage a comeback, with some of his supporters coalescing around a group called the Conservative Democratic Organisation (CDO). How-

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ever, his allies insist that he is not plotting an attempted return to No 10.

Johnson's appearance in Lagos is the latest in a long line of speaking engagements for the private sector. He has received £2.5m as an advance for speeches, meaning he received earnings, hospitality and donations worth more than £5m in the first six months after leaving office.

As well as a lucrative tour of the global speaking circuit since exiting No 10, addressing investors in the technology behind cryptocurrency, insurers and investment bankers, he has taken more than £500,000 as an advance for a memoir. At the same time, he has stayed on in his main job as MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

French protesters and police clash in marches against pension changes

Angelique Chrisafis in Paris

Protesters and police clashed on the edges of street demonstrations in France on Tuesday as hundreds of thousands of people took part in marches against Emmanuel Macron's use of constitutional executive powers to push through an unpopular rise in the pension age to 64.

While demonstrations in Paris and Nantes were peaceful, with the majority of demonstrators chanting and calling for the pension changes to be scrapped, on the margins in some cities, men in masks or hoods clashed with police.

In Paris, police fired teargas and launched a charge after some people at the head of the protest, dressed in black with their faces covered, raided and looted a supermarket and then started a fire as the march approached Place de la Nation in the east of the city. At least 22 people were arrested in the capital by the afternoon, Paris police said.

In the western city of Nantes, protesters threw projectiles at security forces who responded withtear gas, AFP reported. A bank branch was set on fire and rubbish bins were set alight near a court building. Police in Lyon in southeastern France used water cannon. In Lille, police used teargas after bus stops were smashed.

In Bordeaux some hooded people lit fires and projectiles were thrown. In Toulouse, police used water cannon.

Turnout at the street protests across France appeared to be slightly lower than the last day of strikes and protests last Thursday. The interior ministry said 740,000 people took part in protests across France.

Nearly two weeks after the government pushed the new pensions law through using a special provision that bypassed a parliament vote, unions have vowed to continue mass protests to get the government to back down. Macron refuses to abandon the increase in the pension age, which was a central part of his manifesto before he was elected to a second term last year.

Strikes affected transport, the energy sector, schools and civil aviation on Tuesday. About 15% of service stations in France are short of petrol because of refinery strikes. Protesters in Nantes, western France, blocked access roads to the city,creating congestion early in the day. The FIDL high school union said 500 high schools had been barricaded and closed across the country. Dozens of university buildings were also barricaded and closed. The Eiffel tower closed because staff were striking.

Rubbish collectors in Paris are to suspend a three-week strike that has seen thousands of tonnes of garbage accumulate across half of the city, the CGT union said. But it said this was to allow coordination with workers "so we can go on strike again even more strongly".

At the Paris march, Yves, a former teacher and factory worker, who retired at 59, said: "People are demonstrating on the street because citizens aren't being listened to. We're afraid of being teargassed but the police should be protecting us."

"The social state and the social safety net is disappearing," said Françoise, a social worker, who was due to retire in three months at 63.

Inès, 25, from Seine Saint Denis, who had worked as a supermarket cashier and in fast-food chains, said: "This is about workers on the streets fighting for their rights."

Bertrand, a youth worker in Paris, said: "The street must be listened to, which isn't the case so far. It's not only pensions it's about people's whole professional lives and working conditions."

Laurent Berger, the head of the moderate CFDT union, said he would accept the government's offer of talks about general working conditions in France but only if the pensions changes were first "put to one side". He also called for the appointment of a mediator between unions and the government saying this would be "a gesture in favour of cooling off, and finding a way out".

But the government spokesman, Olivier Véran, said the pensions law was no longer up for discussion. "It's in the past now," Véran said.

Twitter to promote only paying users' tweets, Elon Musk announces

Alex Hern

Twitter's feed will promote only the tweets of users paying its £8 monthly subscription service, Elon Musk, the site's owner and chief executive, has tweeted.

From 15 April, the "For you" tab on the site, which attempts to algorithmically curate popular posts for users, will feature only "verified accounts", Musk tweeted, describing the decision as "the only realistic way to address advanced AI bot swarms taking over".

Voting in polls on the site will also require verification "for same reason", Musk added.

From 1 April, existing users with verification badges on the site, now known as "legacy verified", will lose them unless they pay the monthly fee. A "verified account" will need to pay the £8 fee and provide a working phone number.

In 2022, Musk proposed requiring users to pay a fee to vote in polls, after a public proposal that he step down as chief executive of the site came to a surprise close with a large majority in favour of him quitting. Although he had initially promised the vote would be binding, in the hours after he began flirting with the idea that a large number of "bot" accounts had skewed the vote.

▲ *Twitter headquarters in downtown San Francisco, California. Musk said the decision was 'the only realistic way to address advanced AI bot swarms taking over'. Photograph: Amy Osborne/AFP/Getty Images*

As well as the £8 monthly service for Twitter Blue, organisations have been offered a distinctive form of verification, which gives a yellow tick, with a price tag of $1,000 a month. That allows them to bestow further verification for their employees, for another $10 a month, while linking them back to the company.

Not everything is bad for the former Twitter elite, though. According to a report from the Platformer newsletter, Twitter still offers special service to a hand-picked list of 35 VIPs, including Musk himself, who are artificially promoted on the platform's algorithmic feeds.

The list includes a bizarre selection of power users from across American society, including the politicians Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Joe Biden, journalists Ben Shapiro, Matthew Yglesias and Glenn Greenwald, and the poster Dril, who once tweeted (in capitals): "If the zoo bans me for hollering at the animals I will face god and walk backwards into hell."

But the list was not created to boost the accounts, according to the report. Instead, it was assembled to help reassure Musk that algorithmic changes were not affecting his own reach. A cross-section of the platform's biggest accounts, it helped demonstrate which changes to the ranking system were meaningful, in the process increasing their engagement.

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Amsterdam tells young British men who want a 'messy' weekend to stay away

Senay Boztas in Amsterdam

The city of Amsterdam is geo-targeting a campaign to tell young British men wanting a "messy" weekend to stay away.

Research has suggested these Britons aged 18-35, and Dutch men of a similar age, tend to cause most nuisance in the red light district, with stag parties, pub crawls and all-night drink and drug benders making life unbearable for residents.

The online campaign, which starts this week, will be triggered when people in Britain enter terms into search engines such as "stag party Amsterdam", "cheap hotel Amsterdam" and "pub crawl Amsterdam". They will see warning video adverts describing the risks and consequences of excessive alcohol and drug taking: fines, a criminal record, hospitalisation and permanent health damage.

Sofyan Mbarki, deputy mayor for economic affairs and the inner city, said the city was doing more than others in Europe to reject "irresponsible" growth: "Visitors are still welcome, but not if they misbehave and cause nuisance. As a city, we are saying: we'd rather not have this, so stay away," he said in a press statement.

▲ *The city plans earlier closing times for brothels and bars from this weekend, and a ban on cannabis smoking in public from May. Photograph: Naomi O'Leary/The Observer*

The campaign will start with Britain, then be expanded to the Netherlands and beyond. A side-by-side "how to Amsterdam" drive will include posters, screens in hotel lobbies and hosts approaching people to remind them of their manners. The city's "visitor economy vision" includes an earlier closing for brothels and bars starting this weekend, a ban on cannabis smoking in public in central Amsterdam from May, and controversial plans to move the red light district partly to an erotic centre.

Marco Lemmers, chief executive of Conscious Hotels, said he would prefer a positive campaign in the style of Switzerland's. "You could show people that they will get in trouble with certain behaviour, with a bit of humour, but you shouldn't act like everyone who comes here for a wedding is a criminal!" he said. "You should read what the Dutch get up to on the Costa Brava in Spain! Has Amsterdam even thought of the potential collateral damage for the Netherlands as a destination as a whole?"

When the Guardian visited the city centre on Tuesday afternoon, young, male British tourists were not to be found, although there were Frenchmen, Belgians, Italians and Spaniards shopping for cannabis. But Keeley Harris, 23, visiting the red light district from Essex, thought the campaign was a good idea. "My cousin came and stayed in a hotel here and didn't get much sleep," she said. "It was noisy all night."

Corbyn gives strong hint he will stand against Labour as independent

Aletha Adu

Jeremy Corbyn has given his strongest hint yet that he will stand as an independent candidate, saying he has "no intention of stopping the fight" to represent his north London constituents.

The former party leader was on Tuesday formally blocked from standing for Labour at the next election, prompting leftwingers to fiercely criticise Keir Starmer's "authoritarian" and "divisive" move.

Corbyn is unable to put himself forward for selection in his Islington North constituency Labour party (CLP), where he still has a solid support base, because the party's national executive committee (NEC) signs off on all candidate lists.

He released a statement hours after the NEC backed Starmer's motion to block him from standing as a party candidate, with 22 votes to 12.

"The NEC's decision to block my candidacy for Islington North is a shameful attack on party democracy, party members and natural justice," Corbyn said. "Now, more than ever, we should be offering a bold alternative to the government's programme of poverty, division and repression. Keir Starmer has instead launched an assault on the rights of his own Labour members, breaking his pledge to build a united and democratic party that advances social, economic and climate justice.

"I will not be intimidated into silence. I have spent my life fighting for a fairer society on behalf of the people of Islington North, and I have no intention of stopping now."

▲ *Corbyn (left) and Starmer. Momentum called the decision to block the former leader from standing for Labour an 'anti-democratic stitch-up'. Photograph: Ben Birchall/Jacob King/PA*

The Momentum founder, Jon Lansman, who was once one of Corbyn's closest allies, said Starmer was "behaving like some kind of Putin of the Labour party" who had failed to fulfil his leadership promise of ending factionalism.

Corbyn was suspended from Labour in October 2020 for suggesting complaints of antisemitism had been "dramatically overstated" for political reasons. His membership was later reinstated but Starmer refused to restore the party whip, meaning he sits as an independent MP.

The NEC motion did not explicitly mention the issue of antisemitism. Instead, it said Labour's electoral prospects in the seats it needed to win at the next election would be "significantly diminished" should Corbyn be a Labour candidate.

"We've got to recognise that the radical policies that we had under Jeremy Corbyn … were not the problem," Lansman told Times Radio. "The party still supports them. I think we should be campaigning still for radical policy … We have to demand. We're a democratic party. This is not an authoritarian party. Keir Starmer unfortunately is behaving as if he was some kind of Putin of the Labour party. That is not the way we do politics."

The Islington North CLP has publicly rejected Starmer's move to block Corbyn, saying north London voters "deserve a free and fair vote on who gets to represent them". Many leftwing MPs have resorted to sharing the CLP's statement, instead of outrightly condemning Starmer's leadership.

A large number of leftwingers believe there is little point in "incriminating themselves" on broadcast media if they want to stay in the Labour party. "We're not scared, but who wants to follow Corbyn out the door? We have constituents to represent here in parliament," one leftwing MP said.

Corbyn's allies told the Guardian last month he was likely to run as an independent, with one friend saying he would do so once all the routes to the Labour nomination had been exhausted.

The former shadow chancellor John McDonnell said: "With [an] election in 18 months we need a united party to win a Labour government. This decision will be seen as divisive and brutal, victimising someone who has given his life to our movement. We need a campaign in CLPs and affiliates to reverse this decision."

Nadia Whittome, the MP for Nottingham East, added: "It should be up to local members in Islington North to decide who represents them. The motion to ban Jeremy Corbyn from restanding is divisive, an attack on party democracy and a distraction from the vital task of getting the Tories out. I hope it's withdrawn or rejected."

Momentum called the decision an "anti-democratic stitch-up" and said Starmer had expressed support for the local membership selecting their candidates "for every election" while he was running to become Labour leader.

Biden brings forward Belfast visit, putting meeting with king in doubt

Lisa O'Carroll and Julian Borger

▲ *Charles (left) and Joe Biden in Glasgow for the Cop26 climate summit in 2021. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA*

Hopes that Joe Biden's landmark trip to Belfast next month will be rounded off by a meeting with King Charles are fading after the US president brought forward by a week his trip to celebrate 25 years of peace.

It now appears likely the king and the president will stage back-to-back visits in an echo of historic visits to Dublin by Barack Obamaand the queen in 2011.

Neither the White House nor Buckingham Palace would confirm dates but senior figures in Northern Ireland have been told to expect the US president on 11 April and the king one week later.

US sources say the failure to coordinate diaries at the highest level is not a royal snub but a result of Biden's desire to let Bill and Hillary Clinton have "their moment in the sun" during a week of events to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement.

The centrepiece of the week is a reunion, at Queen's University, of the architects of the deal including the former US senator George Mitchell, who chaired the talks between unionists and republicans that ultimately resulted in the IRA and loyalist paramilitaries laying down their arms.

Tony Blair and the former taoiseach Bertie Ahern, who shepherded the deal over the line, will also attend.

Biden accepted Rishi Sunak's formal invitation to Belfast two weeks ago when the prime minister visited the US. But the trip has been complicated by Biden's determination to fit in a family holiday in County Mayo in the west of Ireland, where he has roots.

It is thought, under the provisional itinerary, Biden will visit Belfast on 11 April with a keynote speech the next day alongside a visit to a high-profile US operation in Northern Ireland, possibly in the fintech sector, to highlight the raft of opportunities for American investors in Northern Ireland after Sunak's deal with the EU on Brexit.

He is then expected to travel to Dublin and from there take a three- or four-day holiday in the west of Ireland.

Buckingham Palace declined to offer any comment on the king's expected trip to Northern Ireland but the purpose appears to be to remind unionists and others concerned about the fallout from Brexit of the higher value of the achievements 25 years ago.

However, that challenge could be addressed if the king went to Belfast a week earlier, as this would coincide with the actual anniversary of the Belfast agreement, 10 April, a day before Biden's tentative visit.

To add to the complications, the terrorism threat level in Northern Ireland was raised on Tuesday from substantial to severe. The move, based on an MI5 intelligence assessment, follows the recent shooting of a police officer while he was returning from football training with his son.

The White House is determined to make the trip. Biden considers the Good Friday agreement a model for peace for post-conflict states that, despite the political turbulence caused by Brexit, has yet to be replicated anywhere else.

Prince Harry: royals 'agreed not to sue' newspapers over phone hacking

Jim Waterson Media editor

▲ *Prince Harry departing the high court in London. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA*

Prince Harry has claimed members of the royal family struck a secret deal with newspapers not to sue them over phone hacking because it would "open a can of worms".

Harry alleged his own family hid information from him about press intrusion and he had been conditioned to accept his family's view that they should not dare to take on the British newspaper industry.

In documents filed to the high court, he said there was a private arrangement between the royal family, which he calls "the Institution", and Rupert Murdoch's News Group Newspapers (NGN), which publishes the Sun.

Harry claimed: "There was in place an agreement between the Institution and NGN that we would not engage, or even discuss, the possibility of bringing claims against NGN until the litigation against it relating to phone hacking was over.

"The Institution made it clear that we did not need to know anything about phone hacking and it was made clear to me that the royal family did not sit in the witness box because that could open up a can of worms.

"The Institution was without a doubt withholding information from me for a long time about NGN's phone hacking and that has only become clear in recent years as I have pursued my own claim with different legal advice and representation."

In addition to claims against NGN and the publisher of the Mirror, Harry is now bringing a claim against Associated Newspapers, the publisher of the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday.

He alleges the company's newspapers targeted him through a variety of illegal means including voicemail interception, tapping of landline phones, and inappropriately obtaining credit card records.

Harry said he decided to sue Associated Newspapers because "if the most influential newspaper company can successfully evade justice, then in my opinion the whole country is doomed".

In the witness statement, Harry added: "I am bringing this claim because I love my country and I remain deeply concerned by the unchecked power, influence and criminality of Associated.

"The evidence I have seen shows that Associated's journalists are criminals with journalistic powers which should concern every single one of us. The British public deserve to know the full extent of this cover up and I feel it is my duty to expose it."

He said reports in the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday about his private life had caused him immense grief and paranoia as a young man, citing an article about a little known girlfriend from his Eton days called Laura Gerard-Leigh.

"It led to Laura's parents being doorstepped which they were understandably not pleased about. This sort of thing caused me to try and keep matters as private as I could to avoid this happening."

Harry is one of seven individuals bringing cases against the publisher of the Mail, claiming the group's newspapers regularly broke the law to obtain stories.

Associated Newspapers has described the claims as "preposterous smears" and a "pre-planned and orchestrated attempt to drag the Mail titles into the phone-hacking scandal".

They said the evidence was based on "unsubstantiated and highly defamatory claims, based on no credible evidence."

Harry was present in court for a second day in central London to hear technical arguments about how certain information had been obtained by his legal team.

Witness statements from other claimants – who include Doreen Lawrence, Elton John, Liz Hurley and Sadie Frost – also set out allegations of illegality at Associated Newspapers and the hurt they had caused. Associated has dismissed all the claims as "preposterous smears".

Elton John told the court he believed the Mail was "inhumane" and claimed it had dug up his personal medical records, as well as obtaining the birth certificate of his son Zachary – something he said was "abhorrent and outside even the most basic standards of human decency".

John said: "I have devoted my life to my music but this does not mean deeply personal things which I have to deal with in private are fair game … The fact they did this to our son Zachary when he was a baby, just born, shows just how little integrity and morality exists within this newspaper group."

Doreen Lawrence's lawyer Imran Khan KC said his client felt betrayed by the Mail, who had previously cam-

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paigned on behalf of her murdered son Stephen. He said Doreen Lawrence had found the Mail's duplicity to be "breathtaking and beyond comprehension, even after all the inhumanity we have witnessed since the night Stephen was killed".

Sadie Frost said her ex-husband Jude Law believed she was leaking information to newspapers about her divorce, while she now alleges this was due to illegal interception of information. Liz Hurley said she objected to "Stasi-like surveillance" by the media.

On Tuesday the court heard arguments over whether confidential evidence provided to the Leveson inquiry by Associated Newspapers could now be used by the claimants in the case.

The Mail, which is attempting to have the claims struck out, argued the material – showing payments to private investigators – should not admissible because the data was provided to the public inquiry with a guarantee of confidentiality.

Another witness, the former private investigator Steve Whittamore, said he was paid hundreds of thousands of pounds to provide illegally obtained information to the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday: "It irked me to watch the Leveson inquiry and hear executives and senior figures from the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday deny that their reporters and editors knew what they were asking me to do was unlawful. I know they did."

He said a number of those journalists who used his services and who knew the information he provided for their stories had been obtained unlawfully "are still in senior positions at Associated's newspapers".

Adrian Beltrami KC, representing Associated Newspapers, told the court that another private detective relied on by the claimants had now provided a signed witness statement "denying that he was commissioned or instructed by Associated to carry out any unlawful activity".

Ecuador landslide: search for survivors after dozens of homes buried

Associated Press

A huge landslide that swept over an Andean community in central Ecuador, burying dozens of homes, has killed at least seven people, authorities said as rescuers continued a frantic search for survivors.

Earlier on Monday, officials had reported 16 deaths, but President Guillermo Lasso put the confirmed toll at seven as he arrived on Monday night at the scene of the disaster in Alausí, about 137 miles south of the capital, Quito. Officials also raised the number of people reported missing to 62.

Lasso lamented the tragedy and promised people in the town that rescuers would continue working on the search effort.

Ecuador's risk management secretariat said more than 30 people had been rescued after the mountainside collapsed at about 10pm on Sunday. It said 23 people were injured.

"My mother is buried", said Luis Ángel González, 58, who had also lost other family members. "I am so sad, devastated. There is nothing here, no houses, no anything. We are homeless [and] without family."

▲ *The risk management agency estimates 500 people and 163 homes have been affected by the disaster. Photograph: José Jácome/EPA*

The risk management agency estimated that 500 people and 163 homes had been affected by the disaster, which also destroyed a portion of the Pan-American Highway.

The governor of Chimborazo, Ivan Vinueza, told the Associated Press that some of the injured had been taken to area hospitals. He said officials had urged people to evacuate the area after landslides and cracks began to develop about two months ago. Some had followed the advice, and on Saturday, as tremors intensified, others fled.

Area residents told local media they had heard tremors on the mountain before the landslide, which was estimated to be about 150 metres (490ft) wide and nearly 700 metres long. It swept away trees, homes and other buildings. More than 50 houses were buried under mud and debris.

The emergency response agency said 60% of potable water service in the area had been affected. The presidential office said some schools would be switching to online classes.

Firefighters from nearby cities were dispatched to the area to help. Rescuers focused on the flanks of the landslide where they found traces and debris of houses.

Alberto Escobar, a rescuer and paramedic, said it was unlikely more survivors would be found because of the time that had elapsed. However, he said the search would continue as long as it did not rain.

Video from cameras connected to the country's emergency service network showed people fleeing their homes with help from neighbours. It also showed people transporting appliances and other belongings in vehicles.

Among the survivors housed in temporary shelters was the Zuña family, who were staying at the Iglesia Matriz de Alausí, where rooms for catechism or parish meetings were adapted with bunk beds days ago after authorities declared an emergency in the area because of the risk of landslides.

▲ *Rescuers dig amid debris as they look for survivors. Photograph: Karen Toro/Reuters*

Sonia Guadalupe Zuña said her mother had been reluctant to leave what they had built over the years. "We went to the shelter, but my mother didn't want to," Zuña said. "Later, my daughter went to convince her. When they walked along the rails, everything collapsed. They arrived covered in dirt and crying."

Save for the clothes they had on, Zuña's family lost everything. "I don't know where, but we're all leaving," she said crying. "My parents taught us that by working hard, you get material things, but being together is priceless."

The US is the world's richest country. So why can't I get a glass of clean drinking water?

Arwa Mahdawi

My wife is wonderful in every way, but I realised over the weekend that she is simply not built for the apocalypse. On Sunday, I was scrolling through Twitter and having a nice cup of tea when I saw a tweet from a guy called Ya Fav Trashman about a chemical spill that might affect Philadelphia drinking water. "Equipment failure" at a Trinseo chemical facility had dumped more than 8,000 gallons (about 30,000 litres) of "latex emulsion product" into the Delaware river. You can't just boil or filter these chemicals out of your water.

I immediately spat out my Delaware River tea. (Perhaps the latex was why it was going down so smoothly?) "Yikes," I said. "We'd better get some bottled water." My wife volunteered to go to the nearest shop. She came back with … two bottles.

A human prune, I live in a permanently dehydrated state, but my wife chugs water like her life depends on it. "That's going to last you half an hour," I said. "I hope this crisis only lasts half an hour."

▲ *The Delaware River in Philadelphia, into which the chemicals were spilled. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images*

Reader, it did not. At that moment, everyone in Philadelphia, about 1.5 million people, got an emergency phone alert. It told us that, starting an hour later, at 2pm, we should use bottled water for drinking and cooking, out of an "abundance of caution".

I grabbed a bag and ran to Rite Aid, the nearest purveyor of bottled water. It was crammed and the atmosphere was very jolly. There was still plenty of water available and nobody was buying ridiculous amounts, so there was a general feeling of: "Ha ha, we're all going through dystopia together!"

After every single bottle of water in Philadelphia had been bought and panic had escalated, the city put out an update. The gist of it was: "Whoops! Looks like you didn't need to buy all that bottled water after all, because the tap water is fine until 11.59pm on Monday." What might happen then? Good question. Presumably, tap-drinkers would turn into toxin-laced pumpkins.

I say "presumably" because details of what these chemicals might do to your innards is still scarce. City officials have said that "people who ingest [contaminated] water will not suffer any near-term symptoms", which begs the question about long-term issues.

Meanwhile, a Trinseo executive told local media that the chemicals his

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firm had spilled into the drinking-water supply were no big deal. "It's like the material you find in paint," he said. "It's your typical acrylic paint you have in your house; that's what, really, this material is, in a water base." This is not particularly reassuring, seeing as not many of us go around drinking paint. Maybe this is the sort of corporate statement you come up with when you work with toxic chemicals all day.

The cherry on this dystopian cake? Not even the bottles of water that people were snapping up were guaranteed to be safe. Some Philadelphians discovered that the jugs of water they had bought because of the chemical spill were being recalled because *they* might be tainted by chemicals released by the recent train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio.

Accidents happen, of course. But there is a difference between an unavoidable accident and a series of public health disasters caused by corporate greed, deteriorating infrastructure and a lack of regulation. The US is the richest country in the world. Clean water shouldn't be a luxury – and, yet, that is increasingly what it is becoming.

The most high-profile example of dirty water in the US was in Flint, Michigan, which had lead-poisoned tap water for years. But tap water across the US is laced with disturbing amounts of "forever chemicals": a 2021 investigation by the Guardian and Consumer Reports found that millions of people across the country are exposed to potentially toxic chemicals in their drinking water – disproportionately people in poorer regions.

It is starting to look like the water in Philadelphia will probably be OK. But this episode has served as a disturbing reminder that clean drinking water may not be something we can take for granted much longer. Investors already know this, of course. In 2021, the owner of one hedge fund called water in the US "a trillion-dollar market opportunity". Meanwhile, other investors have been snapping up rights to the Colorado River. Capitalism is going to poison us all.

● Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

My family was massacred on my wedding day. I hold the US in part responsible

Ayman Mohamed Saleh Al Sanabani

▲ *'The US has been noticeably and stunningly absent from efforts to end the conflict.' Photograph: Yahya Arhab/EPA*

My wedding should have been filled with the usual range of wonderful emotions – excitement, trepidation, joy, anxiety and love. Instead, it was marked by terror, devastation and loss.

The night of 5 October 2015 began so beautifully as my two brothers and I each prepared to wed our brides from nearby villages. We, our families and our guests came together at my uncle's house, which had been transformed for the festivities: large tents were set up, delicious smells wafting in the breeze. The brides arrived in a 30-car caravan with honking horns, blaring music and cheering heralding their arrival, before gathering with relatives inside one of the houses.

Without warning, the joyful sounds of celebration were overcome first by the deafening roar of airplanes, then by the pierce of a missile through the air, then a bone-rattling boom. The sky turned red. I closed my eyes. Everything stopped.

Unimaginable horrors greeted me when I opened my eyes. Mangled bodies lay around the courtyard. One missile struck the house where our wives-to-be had gathered with relatives, many of them just children. Those who could still stand began frantically digging through the rubble for their loved ones in spite of the risk that another strike could be imminent. Strangled voices cried out - those who were trapped beneath, those who lay dying and those who were desperate to salvage a scrap of hope in the wreckage.

Would it surprise you to learn that America is in part to blame for these horrors? And that, had Joe Biden kept a campaign promise, future atrocities like this might not be so likely?

Forty-nine people were killed that day, almost half children. Among them were some of the people I loved the most in this world: my bride, Jamila; both of my parents, Mohammad and Fayiza; and two of my brothers, Jamal and Eid. At least 75 more were badly injured, but all who survived will carry the mental scars of this day for the rest of their lives. I have not been able to return to the site since. I don't want to remember what happened that day.

This attack was just one of the thousands of indiscriminate bombings carried out on the people of Yemen by the United Arab Emirates and a Saudi Arabia-led coalition since September 2015 under the guise of stopping Houthi rebels. Instead, these assaults regularly target innocent civilians and the infrastructure that our communities rely on. They have claimed the lives of a quarter of a million Yemenis and devastated our country.

What is happening to Yemen is widely considered to be the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Not one single death would have been possible without the complicity of the United States and its largest defense contractors, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and General Dynamics.

Then presidential candidate Biden promised in 2019 that he would "end the sale of [arms] to the Saudis" and that "they have to be held accountable". In one of his first speeches as president, Biden told the US state department that he would put an end to US support of the war on my home country. It was a major departure from his predecessors, Donald Trump and Barack Obama, and it brought hope to Yemenis here and around the world, as well as international observers and human rights organizations and activists.

Finally, it seemed, the constant flow of top-of-the-line weaponry to the Saudi coalition, and the seemingly endless atrocities like the one that destroyed my family, would cease.

But in the two years since that speech, Biden's once-solid resolve seems to have floundered. When members of Congress took steps to stop or limit the provision of weapons to the coalition, Biden intervened and the bill never got a vote. Instead, he has championed a fragile truce with Saudi Arabia under which Yemenis do not feel an ounce of protection.

The US has been noticeably and stunningly absent from efforts to end the conflict. The recent developments around Saudi Arabia and Iran's deal to restore diplomatic ties are evidence that ending the war is not hopeless. But it is up to the US government to decide to play a meaningful, active role in stopping these war crimes, rather than letting profit motives win out.

Biden – I may not be your constituent, but your actions affect me. As evidenced by your latest budget, your failure to stop US weapons from getting into the hands of the global powers that have made a wreckage of my life, my family and my home affects me. The people of Yemen are relying on your leadership to put an end to this bloodshed. You must keep your promise.

Ayman Mohamed Saleh Al Sanabani is a Yemeni citizen and plaintiff in a lawsuit against Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the US state department, the US defense department, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics for human rights violations in Yemen

What is behind the hounding of Hailey Bieber? Toxic fandom and divisive algorithms

Arwa Mahdawi

▲ *Feeling the weight of fame … Hailey Bieber. Photograph: Gotham/GC Images*

So this is embarrassing to admit, but, when I was a tween, I was obsessed with Bush. THE BAND! THE BAND! I adored the lead singer, Gavin Rossdale, and I assumed that one day the stars would align and I would marry him. (The stars made me gay instead.) I spent hours on the dial-up internet inhaling Bush-related content and I harboured a grudge against Gwen Stefani, because she was with Gavin, living my dream. What I didn't do, however, was send Stefani any online threats. Mainly because 1) that would be unhinged; and 2) the internet was very slow and it wasn't easy to instantly harass people online.

Fast-forward a million years and the internet is now one big harassment machine. Fans, tweenage and older, can become unhealthy fanatics very easily. See, for example, the drama between the fanbases of the model Hailey Bieber and the singer Selena Gomez. This saga is too inane to properly explain, but, in brief, the two women have been pitted against each other by their fans because they each dated Justin Bieber (to whom the model is now married). This fake feud was amplified when Gomez joined TikTok, because social media algorithms love pushing divisive content that drives engagement.

Gomez fans have been attacking

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Bieber so relentlessly that the poor woman has repeatedly begged people to leave her alone. Gomez has also asked her fans to stop, to no avail. Earlier this month crowds at a Justin Bieber concert chanted "Fuck Hailey Bieber" when he went on stage. It doesn't matter how rich and famous you are: relentless harassment is unbearable.

It's not just Bieber who has found herself hounded as a result of toxic fandom. Being a critic today should come with hazard pay; say the wrong thing about someone's fave and you can quickly find yourself the victim of a vicious pile-on. In December, for example, the co-director of Everything Everywhere All at Once had to plead with fans to stop criticising the New York Times' film critics for leaving the movie off their Top 10 lists.

Rabid fandom isn't all bad: in some instances it has been channelled constructively. See, for example, Taylor Swift fans taking legal action alleging anti-competitive practices in Ticketmaster's ticket-selling process. Or Britney Spears fans working to end her conservatorship. Still, there is a very dark side to modern fandom. More than ever, fame comes at a price.

My brain can't handle all of the school emails! Why I've enlisted my kids to help preserve my sanity

Emma Wilkins

I sat our three (primary-aged) children down the other day and told them … Actually, that's not true. I didn't even tryto sit them down. But I did catch their attention when they all happened to be in our kitchen/living area at various stages of getting ready for school.

So no, the kids weren't all *sitting*-quietly, looking up at me with large, attentive eyes – but at least I wasn't (as I'm prone to do at times) yelling through the house.

Once I had their attention (or at least, some of it) I told them I needed their help – not just "help", but *theirs*. I didn't go so far as to say I wasn't coping with the pace of life but that was the gist. I warned them my brain was behaving like a sieve, that my inbox and calendar were out of control, that even if the school sent me three important reminders about this or that, and even if I read them all (I most likely would not), that would be no guarantee I would remember what I was supposed to when I was supposed to. I can't remember if I added that their dad was also unable to cope with the tsunami.

Long story short: I was absolving us from full responsibility for school reminders (times three) and giving some to them.

Don't get me wrong. I love my children's school, and the time its teachers take to keep parents in the loop. I'm not against reminders, or newsletters, or updates, or FYIs. I'd certainly prefer too much communication than too little. I'm just not, well, keeping up with all of it right now. And once it occurred to me that maybe, right now I can't, it made sense to take a breath, explain, and ask for help.

▲ *'We can upgrade the hard drives on our computers, we can improve their memory, their capacity, their speed, but we can't upgrade our bodies or our brains. We can only be in one place at one time.' Illustration: Kubkoo/Getty Images/iStockphoto*

The problem is, we live in an age where it's just as easy for someone to contact 50 people as it is for them to contact one, where there's no limit on how many demands can be made on us, because all it takes is a click of a button to make them. At the same time, there are no more hours in a day. We can upgrade the hard drives on our computers, we can improve their memory, their capacity, their speed, but we can't upgrade our bodies or our brains. We can only be in one place at one time.

Sometimes emailed information is nice to know but it's not information I need to know, and I needn't feel guilty if I don't have time to process and action *all*of it. Sometimes I *am* the person who needs to know something but sometimes I'm actually not. Sometimes the (little) person it concerns can take responsibility themselves.

And often that little person is better equipped to remember library day and cupcake day and free-dress day than I am, because they might actually care, *and* they might remember on their own – their brains are at a stage where they can absorb entire languages with ease, while I struggle to remember people's names. Also, they're at a stage in life where they only *really* have to manage themselves. They're not facing requests and demands and expectations from what seems like all directions, all the time. They have capacity that I do not.

I think of myself as being naturally quite diligent and not very rebellious. Sometimes the fact I could *not* do something I've been asked to do – or expect myself to do – doesn't even occur to me, even if the request or expectation is unreasonable. I'm also prone to feeling guilty, even (or especially?) over the smallest things.

But the more I think about it, the more important my sanity is, for me and for my family. Preserving it by lowering expectations of how much I can manage, my own and other people's, shouldn't induce guilt.

Perhaps you have *more* than three children and/or more than you can manage in the time you have each day. Perhaps you also need to stop attempting the impossible and ask for help.

I'm yet to determine how effective downward delegating will be but I'm hopeful. After talking to the kids, I asked them if they understood. They said they did. Time will tell. But what's the worst that can happen? School uniform on a free-dress day? No money for a cupcake stall? Reading the same library book two weeks in a row?

It could be worse.

● Emma Wilkins is a Tasmanian journalist and freelance writer

Preserving my sanity by lowering expectations of how much I can manage shouldn't induce guilt

He invented a push-up machine while in prison for murder. Now he's at Georgetown

Ramon Antonio Vargas

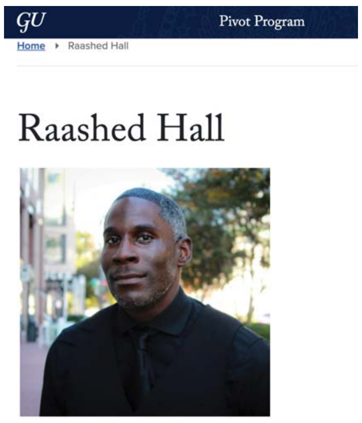
After spending nearly two decades in prison, a Washington DC man is striving to rebuild his life by marketing and selling a workout machine he invented while serving his sentence.

Raashed Hall, 40, is getting his second chance through Georgetown University's Pivot program, which is a nine-month course aimed at teaching entrepreneurship and building life skills for people who are returning from incarceration.

Up to 150 people apply for the program each year since it was founded in 2018. The program only accepts about 20 fellows annually, allowing them to earn a certificate and get hands-on training outside the classroom, according to a profile of Hall which the DC news outlet WJLA published on Monday.

▲ *Raashed Hall appears on a WJLA-TV newscast and shows off the push-up machine he invented. Photograph: WJLA-TV*

Hall's participation in the Pivot program came after he pleaded guilty in 2004 to a shooting which left an eight-year-old girl named Chelsea Cromartie dead. On the day of the killing, Hall had been out with his pregnant girlfriend, and they were drawn into a violent confrontation outside a car-



▲ *Raashed Hall on the Pivot program's website. Photograph: Georgetown University's Pivot program*

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ryout restaurant in DC that ended with the couple fleeing as someone fired several gunshots at them.

Hall then called his brother to bring him a gun and to drive him around in search of those who had attacked him, he admitted, according to a summary of the case in the Washington Post. They eventually spotted one of the attackers sitting on the porch of a home less than a mile away from the restaurant, and Hall fired the gun his brother had brought him at the assailant.

No one on the porch was hit. But Cromartie was inside watching television while she, her mother and her brother visited her aunt. One of the bullets which Hall fired crashed through the home's window, hit Cromartie in the head and killed her. Cromartie's aunt was also wounded, authorities said.

Hall ultimately pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and assault with a dangerous weapon. He also apologized to Cromartie's family before the judge overseeing the case sentenced him in January 2005.

"I did not mean to do this to anyone, especially not that precious little girl of yours," Hall said to Cromartie's loved ones, the Post reported. He said he accepted that "a beautiful child lost her life" because of him and that Chelsea's death haunted his dreams all the time.

Hall told WJLA that he resolved to change his life while inside the walls of the prison where he served his sentence. He designed and patented a device that uses blocks and adjustable resistance bands to make push-ups more of an intense exercise.

His first Power Push-Up machine prototype five years ago consisted of pieces of wood as well as a buckle. He said he's since developed three more robust working prototypes, and he added that some of his fellow inmates used their writing and drawing skills to help him start the patent process.

Hall said he was informed of the Pivot program as his release date approached. He began pursuing a spot in the program immediately after hearing the words "entrepreneurship" and "Georgetown", and he said he was thrilled to get accepted last year.

"It was like it all came together," Hall told the Pivot program's website. "It was like a light came on."

On Monday, he was scheduled to pitch his Power Push-Up machine at the Georgetown entrepreneurship challenge and compete against business students from all over the university, WJLA reported. He placed second at a separate Georgetown-wide pitch competition in early February, according to Pivot's Instagram account.

Hall said he views his enrollment in the Pivot program as getting another "foot in the door" as he works to establish a new life for himself after serving his time. He also works as a personal fitness trainer with about 100 clients.

"Even though XYZ happened," Hall told the Pivot site, "this is not going to define who I am."

He added: "Last year, I was in prison. Now, I'm … [going] to a business school in Georgetown … It makes me proud."

Cromartie's grandfather, Daniel, told the Guardian on Tuesday that no one in his family had any comment about Hall and Pivot. Referring to his granddaughter's case, Daniel Cromartie said: "None of us want to bring any of that back up."

WeWork mugs for $500: 10 of the strangest merch items from companies that crashed

Alaina Demopoulos and Sam Wolfson

You've just been laid off from your job at a once mighty startup that was going to change the world. The New York Times has exposed your CEO's fraudulent business model. Investors have freaked. The stock market is hemorrhaging. Your office keycard doesn't work. What you do next is very important: go raid the merch closet.

By now, we've all seen enough rise-and-fall documentaries to know how this sort of thing plays out. First come layoffs, then lawsuits, and perhaps a prison sentence for bosses like Theranos's Elizabeth Holmes or Enron's Jeffrey Skilling. One thing we hear less about: the killer resale market that comes with an era-defining financial disaster.

Corny brand merch like T-shirts and mugs suddenly become hot collectibles. It's all profit for disgruntled employees who acquired the office swag for free, or those in the industry who picked up complimentary items at conferences.

This happens fairly quickly: as the Wall Street journal reported, Silicon Valley Bank items hit eBay just a few days after the bank's collapse. Coffee tumblers, blankets and cheese boards were all up for sale. The cheese board alone cost $200.

A $100 Theranos gift card was on eBay for $10,000. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

It's a niche, but dedicated, market. One investor named Ted Aronson told the publication he had probably spent about $25,000 on financial memorabilia during his time in the field. Items like a Bernie Madoff portrait and an Enron code of ethics booklet decorate his Pennsylvania office.

Anna Sorokin, the so-called SoHo grifter, said she "ironically" purchased an FTX sweater to wear to a Christmas party last year. This week she also purchased an SVB hoodie for, as the Journal put it, her "growing collection of financial-disaster swag".

Ready to make the great American tradition of failing upwards – until it all comes crashing down – a part of your brand? Here are our favorite items that honor fiascos the business world would rather forget. And yes, these prices are for real.

10) HQ T-shirt, $49.99

At its peak, the game-show-on-your-phone app had $100m and 2.3 million players. Fans had the chance to win anywhere between $11 and $25,000 if they answered the right question, with the cash supplies coming from the huge amount of VC funding poured into the company. The only question HQ couldn't answer was how that business model was ever supposed to work.

9) WeWork mug, $499.99

"Always do what you love," says the slogan from a company with a CEO who preached the solution to millennial burnout as in-office shuffleboard tables and kombucha on tap. For anyone missing the feeling of being imprisoned in a windowless office building where Foster the People is pumped into the toilets: these once ubiquitous mugs are now going for hundreds of dollars.

8) CNN+ notepad, $40

So it's a news streaming service that has no live news but Jake Tapper's getting a book club? I'll pass, Mom.

7) Liz Truss letter, $1,200

The eBay notes for this say "selling on elderly gentleman's behalf", but we wouldn't be surprised if the elderly gentleman in question is one Eli Truss, fallen on hard times after the becoming-prime-minister-for-six-weeks long con didn't work out.

6) MoviePass card, $1,400

The seller of this $1,400 debit card makes clear in their listing that it "NO LONGER WORKS" but anyone who used MoviePass knows that it never did.

5) Lehman Brothers MTV baseball hat, $75

OK, sorry, this one we actually want. Why Lehman Brothers collaborated with MTV on a baseball hat is a mystery lost to the ages but the green-and-white pinstripe design is preppy Nolita dirtbag.

4) Gawker Media list T-shirt, $250

Gawker's take on the once ubiquitous American Apparel Helvetica shopping bag lists the now defunct media company's former brands. The eBay listing calls the T-shirt "rare", as it was originally "only available to employees", although considering how often the group fired all its employees

Photograph: eBay/budhistbudd

only to rehire new ones a year later, that could be thousands of people.

3) Silicon Valley Bank box, $203.50

As the eBay seller wrote in their listing, they received their initial job offer letter in this box, a mere "one month before the bank blew up". Presumably their pink slip came in a branded trash bag. Serious inquiries only, please: the seller "has to pay rent this month".

2) FTX fortune cookie, $19.99

In a delicious bit of irony, the crypto giant FTX once paired with an ad agency to deliver branded fortune cookies to Chinese restaurants across the country. This one costs $20 and ominously reads, "You're about to change your life forever." Buyers, beware: you may be able to find one of your own for less. CoinDesk reported in December that many FTX fortune cookies were still being served by actual restaurant owners after the collapse.

1) $100 Theranos gift card, $10,000

This eBay seller received a $100 gift card to the phony blood-testing company Theranos during a tour of the company's lab facility in Redwood City, California. Thankfully, they did not use it.

Manga-nifique! How France became obsessed with Japanese anime

Phil Hoad

You might say that Vincent van Gogh was one of the first Japanese popculture otaku (geeks) in Europe. With the 19th-century japonisme craze in full swing, he coveted ukiyo-e woodblock prints like modern-day collectors hoard rare manga. Japanese art deeply influenced his work, from his flattening of perspective to his bold lines. He went to the south of France hoping to encounter the same radiant nature and spiritual freshness that figured in his east-Asian fantasia. Upon seeing Katsushika Hokusai'sThe Great Wave Off Kanagawa– a supposed inspiration for his own The Starry Night – he raved to his brother Theo in a letter: "The waves are claws, the boat is caught in them, you can feel it."

The new animation Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman, by France-based animator Pierre Földes, shows that the French love affair with Japanese visual arts is still throbbing. Anime and manga are a worldwide cultural force but nowhere more so than France – an unbelievable 55% of comics sold there in 2021 were manga, according to consumer research body GfK. A beguiling mashup of six Haruki Murakami short stories set in the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman emerged foremost from Földes's own first contact with Japanese literature as a teenager. "I loved the fact the style of storytelling was so different to the west," says the director. "It's more contemporary, less structured. Here, everything is very structured, with a beginning and end. The story goes from here to there, through different moments of emotion. I'm not so much into that."

So Földes freestyled his way through Murakami, picking the material that chimed:story threads about a drifting Tokyo salaryman whose wife leaves him "because living with you is like living with a chunk of air"; her freaky hotel encounter years earlier; a banker's alliance with a talking frog against the giant subterranean, earthquaking-causing worm. Choosing these parts "like delicious cakes in a patisserie", Földes blends them into an existential spiral that is somehow still perfectly Murakamian in its palette-cleansing effect. The limpid animation helps;

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it was drawn over a live-action version, inspired by the harder-edged Japanese movements that fly in the face of Disney fluidity.

Földes is at the arthouse end of the second coming of Japanese pop culture in France, which began in the late 1970s. This time, instead of Mt Fuji, boozy geishas and melancholic peasants, it was giant robots, Corgi bounty-hunters and tumorous apocalyptic psychics. After a few unsuccessful attempts to introduce anime to France in the early 1970s, the arrival in 1978 of mecha (ie robot) cartoon Goldorak on A2, one of the country's three public TV stations, was the breakthrough. Featuring the eponymous Swiss army knife of a transforming robot, it quickly become a phenomenon, getting its own Paris Match cover, and opened the door for a deluge of anime to hit French children's TV.

Spurred on by Goldorak, others had bigger ambitions than just imports. Jean Chalopin's film production company DIC decided in the mid-70s to pivot to producing children's TV series. With limited animation facilities available in Europe, Chalopin – still only in his mid-20s – scoured Asia for the production capacity he needed to create serial episodes. Like most of France, he knew little about Japan's powerhouse comics and animation industry, but when he saw it he knew it was the answer to his problems. As he puts it today: "Aux innocents les mains pleines." (Fortune favours the innocent.) Despite speaking no Japanese at the time, he set up a subsidiary company in the country to hire animators for what became two legendary Franco-Japanese collaborations: Ulysses 31 and The Mysterious Cities of Gold.

Despite France – with its long *bande dessinée* (BD) tradition – being fertile territory for a Japanese invasion, Chalopin still had to satisfy the public TV channels' educational remit in order to persuade them to put out his series.

▲ *Flying in the face of Disney ... Goldorak. Photograph: Collection Christophel/Alamy*

Hence the choice of The Odyssey as the source material for his 31st century-set science-fiction version: "We did a story that was Goldorak-ish in a universe that was French-acceptable. And Cities of Gold used the same kind of cultural alibi." (Now an investor in the Bahamas, he actually looks rather like his russet-haired Ulysses.) The Japanese designers and animators were eager to work on such exotic material, and brought their dynamic style to both panoramic, almost psychedelic sagas.

Broadcast in France in 1981 and 1983 respectively, later sold widely around the world and allowing DIC to produce for the US market, Chalopin believes Ulysses 31 and The Mysterious Cities of Gold shook up western animation: "If you look at what Hanna-Barbera or Filmation were doing at the time, the 'camera' was always fixed, and the character moves in front of it. Because in American animation, the camera was still, they did 12 frames a second. For budget reasons, the Japanese generally did six or eight – but to compensate they did realistic-type camera moves. 'Funny angle', they called it in Japanese."

Meanwhile, outlandish import anime with that kinetic vibe was taking over French TV, under the auspices of competing CBBC-style kids' omnibuses. Chief among them was Club Dorothée on TF1, fronted by wholesome singer-actor Frédérique Hoschedé (known as Dorothée) from 1987, who had been poached during this anime boom from the A2 children's umbrella that put out Goldorak. During the late 80s and early 90s, Club Dorothée kept French youth weaned on a steady diet of Japanese mayhem: the likes of mythological romp Les Chevaliers du Zodiaque (Knights of the Zodiac), high-school superhero fantasy Sailor Moon and what spiralled into a generational phenomenon, Akira Toriyama's Dragon Ball.

But the schoolyard stampede caused a moral backlash – particularly against edgy fare like the Mad Max-inspired Ken le Survivant (Fist of the North Star) – among those who feared Japanimation was corrupting French youth. Future presidential candidate Ségolène Royal was among its most prominent critics, lambasting among other things its recidivist violence in her takedown book Le Ras-le-Bol des Bébés Zappeurs (Fed Up of Baby Channel-Zappers).

Manga expert Nicolai Chauvet remembers the furore: "The kids had become hooked on this drug. It was pure serotonin, the kids needed their shot of Dragon Ball. And she politicised it to stop French kids going crazy because of Japanese cartoons. So then there was this deprogramming. Anime disappeared almost completely from Club Dorothée, and was replaced by disgusting French sitcoms with ridiculous teenagers having their first kiss." Club Dorothée shut up shop for good in 1997.

But it was only the end of the beginning for Japanese pop culture in France. Manga in properly bound formats – such as Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira, hitherto only distributed in throwaway comic form – began arriving en masse in the country in the late 90s. With the Japanese industry at its apex, the riches of five decades of imaginative labours poured into the country. Chauvet, who under the pseudonym Méko is now one of France's leading collectors, had an even stronger culture shock than Földes: "Manga slapped me in the face. It was even more punk than Franco-Belge comics. The freedom to do whatever you want: I'm going to have some dinosaurs in the midst of some Chinese kung fu thing with daft legends, and stick the Terminator in there too! With humour and drawings that had a surgical, diabolic precision. And all serving the reader, without the illustrator's ego in the way."

This hyper-fecundity would sweep Japanese manga to its present supreme position in France; it is currently the world's biggest manga importer. But the traffic only goes one way. French BD is generally ignored in Japan, and it will be a shock if Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman – like fellow recent Japanese-infused French animations The Red Turtle and The Summit of the Gods before it – makes a splash there. If it wants French-themed content, Japan creates it itself, like the French Revolution drama The Rose of Versailles. "Japan is insular; it takes," says Chauvet. "They're open, they're curious, but they take [what they want]. It auto-nourishes when it comes to pop culture." Maybe Japanese creators themselves are more reciprocating, though: one of Studio Ghibli's original touchstones when it was starting out in the

▲ *The breakthrough ... Goldorak screened on French TV in the 1970s. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy*

1980s was the surrealism and pointed humour of Paul Grimault's largely forgotten 1980 animation The King and the Mockingbird.

No one these days would accuse Ghibli of being anything other than an upstanding moral influence on young people – and France unreservedly embraces the breadth and variety of everything Japanese manga and anime has to offer. The pandemic only further intensified manga mania; bought by millennial parents who were the original early adopters keen to share their passion with house-bound offspring. Eiichiro Oda's One Piece, the fantasmagorically OTT pirate saga, is the bestselling top dog, the successor to Dragon Ball and Dragon Ball Z; Emmanuel Macron, annoyingly down with the kids, likes to slip it into his tweets. With the price for the rights for new titles now sky-high, Chauvet believes the French market could be hitting saturation point. Or then again, maybe not: "We've seen it before: the more we're in crisis, the more teenagers buy manga."

● Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman is released on 31 March.

'I have to lie low. I'm totally on edge': Uganda's club scene fears anti-gay law

Frank L'Opez

Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni, in his 38th year of increasingly authoritarian rule, has declared that his people will never embrace homosexuality and that the west's "deviations" are not to be normalised. Instead, Ugandan MPs have approved an anti-LGBTQ+ bill which recommends heavy sentences – including the death penalty – for acts of homosexuality in a country where it is already illegal. It awaits the president's signature to become law.

The 2023 anti-homosexuality bill criminalises those touching another person "with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality" and any person who identifies as "a lesbian, gay, transgender, a queer" with up to 10 years in prison. Up to five years in prison is deemed adequate for the vague act of "promotion of homosexuality". Only two out of 389 MPs voted

▲ *A music festival in Uganda. The country's music scene, home to queer artists from across east Africa, is reeling after proposed new anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Photograph: Badru Katumba/AFP/Getty Images*

against the bill, which has been broadly welcomed across Ugandan society.

Kampala is one exception. The underground electronic music scene in the capital has flourished in the past decade, drawing global recognition for its openness, verve and innovation; its festivals and labels have produced cross-continental collaborations and drawn a stream of first-time musical tourists to Uganda. This scene has become a safe space for members of the east and central African LGBTQ+ community, creating their own niche in an already thriving subculture. But with homophobic vitriol increasing across society, and one MP, Sarah Opendi, calling for the castration of gay men, this community finds itself pushed further underground.

"Queerness has always existed in underground spaces, and it is in the weirdness of musical expression where we became camouflaged," says producer Frankie (names have been changed). Homosexual sex was already punishable by life imprisonment in Uganda, but there was some leeway: "[If we were] dressed weirdly at a festival, we could be stopped by police but say, 'I'm an artist,'" he says. "But now the climate is changing. An attack on us is an attack on being different."

Frankie, 25, makes "experimental electronic music that has a techno feel, inspired by traditional Ugandan rhythms". I catch him as he returns from lunch with his family. "When I came out a few years ago, it was messy – they didn't kick me out of the house, but we basically don't talk about it," he says. Theirs is a complicated relationship that could easily exist any-

▲ *Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni. Photograph: John Muchucha/AP*

where across the globe, but should Museveni pass the bill, it could make his parents' perceived silent approval a criminal act.

Frankie is incredulous when he considers that many Ugandans consider homosexuality a choice: "To believe that means that being gay is in the frame of possibility for a homophobe." For him, these banal hypocrisies highlight the fragility of a patriarchal society. "Anything that threatens male power and authority creates violence. We cannot think about men being treated like women [within a sexual

Continued *on page 22*

Continued from page 21

context] – this is what they find the most appalling, because women are treated so badly.

"I feel like I have to lie low right now – I am totally on edge," Frankie continues. "As for social media: I opened it to [see] a story of a trans person being castrated in the street … it's too much."

It is not just the organisations put in place to protect the community, such as Smug (Sexual Minorities Uganda), that have halted their operations after being criminalised by the bill: the law would also make it illegal for a landlord to rent an event space or a music studio, or for someone to help put on an event or even DJ on the same bill if there was the merest inkling that someone identifying as a homosexual was performing or recording. "Everyone is guilty by association now," says Anthony, a 27-year-old events curator and music promoter.

Sindy is a 23-year-old music producer from Tanzania. She identifies as a queer female and has lived in Kampala for five years. "There is a special power in knowing who you are and showing it to the world," she says, "but our safe space, our bubble, and community is at risk."

Since the bill has moved to the forefront of Ugandan society, she has been living in fear. "My mind is spiralling unbearably. I feel unsettled and can't even think about making music," she says. "But I can stay home. I worry for friends who you would not consider 'straight acting' and have to work in busy places downtown."

LGBTQ+ groups in Uganda have documented a rapid increase in attacks since 2019, fuelled by violent political rhetoric on television and social media. The furore has become accompanied by conspiracy theories, such as one perpetuated by minister for security Gen Elly Tumwine claiming that an LGBTQ-affiliated terrorist group called the Red Movement is attempting to create anarchy all over the world by weaponising homosexuality and cryptocurrency.

It has reached a point where many artists are now being forced to consider their future in Kampala. "There's only a sense of self-preservation right now. We are more interested in being safe than defiant," Anthony says on the prospect of any fightback from the community. "Many artists are looking outside the country, where they are already breaking commercially. Anyone whose queerness is attached to their art is in an impossible position."

Sindy refers to herself as a "bad bitch", but "as human bodies, we are not just sexual beings. We perform on stage, we work, and contribute to society in so many ways – to think of us only sexually is fucked up." She is confident that the hatred fed into her society is a distraction "for a failing economy and the general injustices we are forced to see every day – but let us not forget that it is colonialists who brought homophobia with them".

Homosexual acts were openly accepted in the pre-colonial era in east Africa, but made illegal with the introduction of the Ugandan penal code, with "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" still used to arrest homosexuals today. Introducing a European morality on "native cultures" they found unruly and permissive, the anti-sodomy law subjugated a vast swathe of the population located across the British empire.

These laws have rendered LGBTQ + people at risk not only of police violence but of bribery and extortion, too. "It goes further than police corruption now," says Sindy. "We had an incubation space to nurture queer talent in a city we love, and now the idea of being forced to become a refugee … " The thought stops her in her tracks: not everyone has the option to leave.

● Names and some other identifying details have been changed. A GoFundMe page has been set up to help those in need

> *Queerness has always existed in the underground. It's in the weirdness of musical expression where we were camouflaged*
>
> *Frankie, 25*

Did Gwyneth Paltrow ski into a retired optometrist? I couldn't care less, but the farce is unmissable

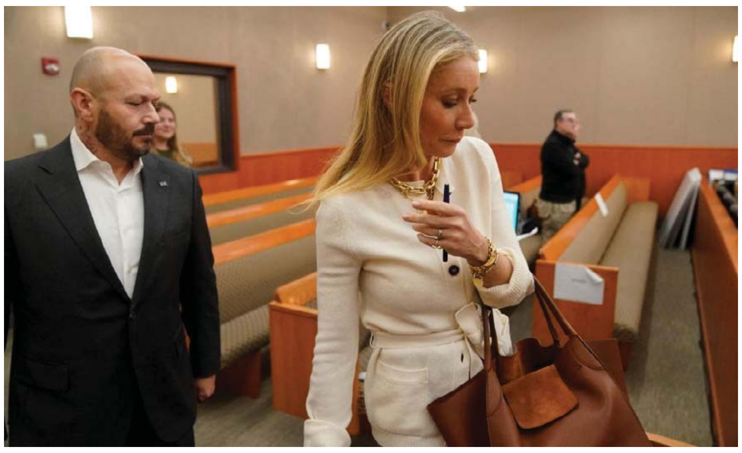
Marina Hyde

To Park City, Utah, currently scene of one of the great pleasures of modern life: a court battle that you'd be relaxed for either side to lose. Yes, it's the Gwyneth Paltrow ski massacre trial. Take your seats for a preposterously camp battle between a well-to-do retired optometrist who said the high priestess of fanny-steaming skied into him – and Her Vajesty herself, who says he skied into her. Why is this not happening at The Hague? Sorry, butNO sense of occasion.

Before we go any further I want to make a deeply serious point. Something happened that day. Something happened on that mountain in that luxury ski resort, up there in God's cathedral – and, like anyone who has watched either the plaintiff or the defendant on the stand at any length … I literally could not care less what it was. I mean, this is as low stakes as it gets. Asked about what had been taken from her by the events on the Deer Valley slopes, Paltrow delivered the sociopathically straight-to-meme line: "Well, I lost half a day of skiing." (Bear in mind this is a woman who claims that water has feelings.) For his part, Terry Sanderson's lawyer put things into perspective by declaring: "After the crash, he's no longer charming."

We'll come on to the charmicidal maniac/wronged wellness guru in a moment.

First, a reminder that Mr Sanderson is seeking $300,000 in damages, which – to us country mice on this side of the Atlantic – feels a little eye-catching. Of course, we only have an outsider's grasp of the baroque flourishes of the US legal system, but it is surely our understanding that any citizen of that great nation making some kind of personal injury claim understands that *this is America*, and asks for at least $30m just as a point of principle? Then again, having watched him, I think I'm on the verge of understanding why Mr Sanderson values his lost charm at a mere $300,000.



▲ *'Every day Gwyneth has swept in wearing category 5 neutrals, hopefully drawn from her own brand's Courtroom Casuals line.' Photograph: Rick Bowmer/AFP/Getty Images*

In reality, so well-adjusted is our early 21st-century system of social capital that there are few better ways to accrue charm than from starring in the Gwyneth Paltrow ski trial. This seems to have been something once dimly grasped by Mr Sanderson, who emailed his daughters in the immediate wake of the accident with the possibly unfortunate subject line: "I'm famous … at what cost?" As for whether the collision put him off skiing ever again, on Monday he revealed he "tried not to go back", but eventually overrode himself and took several skiing trips, albeit dressed in – [slightly traumatised pause] "this ungodly looking red fluorescent outfit that I bought". Stakes, dear boy. Stakes.

Arguably Terry's most compelling proof that he suffered a brain injury is his choice of lawyer, who makes Lionel Hutz look like Cicero. At one point in the proceedings, this Kristin Van Orman almost squealed: "I am so jealous! … I have to wear four-inch heels just to make it 5'5!" "They're very nice," lied Gwyneth. "You're not trained in accident reconstruction?" ran another gambit. "Me?" asked Gwyneth, "No". "Neither am I!" chortled Kristin.

A few years ago, Gwyneth stopped acting to focus on her lifestyle brand Goop, and I would be overjoyed if she now stopped that to focus on starring in court cases serving up this level of farm-to-table hilarity. "Private security for my client wanted to bring in treats for the bailiffs for how helpful they've been," announced her lawyer one morning. "So, I wanted to do that transparently and see if there are any objections?" Alas, there were some objections. That basic bitch Lady Justice apparently says madam can't treat-basket her way out of this one.

But you can't keep a good wellness entrepreneur down. Every aesthetically challenging day in that hideous orange Utah legal facility, Gwyneth has swept in wearing category 5 neutrals, hopefully drawn from her own brand's Courtroom Casuals line. (Though all Gwyneth's garments are made from the neck hairs of these really incredible Himalayan goats to whose sheddings a normie like you could never have access, do be reassured they WILL be lovingly ripped off in never-pill nylon and available later this year as Halloween costumes.) Just as Goop is a place where food is never eaten, but "grabbed" or "reached for", so it is that one of the best things Gwyneth's website can say about any outfit is that it "takes you effortlessly" from one part of your day to another. In this case, from pursing your lips in court, to making that evening's waiter give you the resume and achievements of every ingredient in the biodynamic salad, before pursing your lips once more and hissing: "No thank you, I'll just have broth."

As for any lessons that might be drawn from this appallingly entertaining courtroom dramedy, I am afraid I can only return to an oldie but a goodie: never litigate. Never litigate unless you absolutely positively have

▲ *Terry Sanderson, the Utah man suing Gwyneth Paltrow, testifying in court. Photograph: Rick Bowmer/AP*

to – and as far as anyone can see, Mr Sanderson didn't have to. We already know what Gwyneth Paltrow's like. But we now know, from Terry's own testimony, that he ordered his former girlfriend to leave him after he began his legal journey as "I knew she didn't buy into it". "My interaction with my family has been difficult," he reflected yesterday. "Something is wrong with my essence and what I bring to the table with them." Earlier, one of his daughters had testified that he was "obsessed" with the trial, while another's deposition declared he was "emotionally abusive" and "quick to anger" before the 2016 collision. Whatever the thread-count of this dirty linen, is it worth it? For anyone other than the countless mind-boggled spectators, the answer can only be … no.

Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

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Victory over big pharma opens door to cheaper tuberculosis drugs

Amrit Dhillon in New Delhi

People with drug-resistant tuberculosis in India could soon have access to critical medication at a far lower cost after the authorities rejected US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson's application to extend a patent.

The firm wanted to extend its patent on bedaquiline, which expires in July, until 2027, which would have prevented cheaper generic versions reaching the market.

It was seen as a victory for two women who have been fighting to make a drug for the disease affordable to all. Nandita Venkatesan from India and Phumeza Tisle from South Africa filed a petition in 2019 with the Indian Patent Office to stop Johnson & Johnson's application, a petition supported by the medical NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

The decision by the patent office opens the door for other companies to produce accessible versions, with some health experts estimating that the costs of treatment could be cut by 80%, from $46 (£37) a month per patient to $8 (£6.50).

▲ World TB day is marked in in Palampur, India, with a rangoli pattern and a potent message. Photograph: Sanjay Baid/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Given that India sends generic drugs to many low-income countries, this breakthrough will help patients in states that obtain their TB drugs through the World Health Organization.

Bedaquiline is considered the last resort for those with advanced TB. Like most treatments for drug-resistant TB, it has unpleasant side-effects, but when the FDA approved it in 2012 it was the first new drug for the disease in 40 years.

Pharmaceutical companies in India have started work on generic versions of the drug. Some have submitted data to the WHO and have pre-qualified to become suppliers. A version is expected to be available as soon as August.

Venkatesan, who lost her hearing in 2013 as a result of treatment for intestinal TB and has had to endure years of painful operations and injections, said she could not hold back tears when the patent office announced its decision on Friday.

"The verdict is too late for me, my hearing has gone for good. But the fight had to be fought because if something better and easier is available, then why shouldn't patients have access to it?" said the 33-year-old journalist from Mumbai.

Leena Menghaney, a global intellectual property adviser at MSF in New Delhi, said: "Bedaquiline was a breakthrough drug for TB and now it's going to be more easily available." Johnson & Johnson's "evergreening" – continuously extending patent rights – was "unacceptable", she said. "All the company did was change the compound into a salt to justify an extension."

India has the highest burden of TB and drug-resistant TB in the world. More than 1,000 Indians a day die of the disease.

Covid made the situation worse. A WHO global report last year found that India had 18% more cases in 2021 than in 2020 – a consequence largely of the pandemic and lockdowns as patients were unable to visit clinics to get tested or collect medicines. The number of TB cases detected in April 2020 fell by 80% from the previous April as Indians missed test appointments and some labs closed.

India's target is to end TB by 2025, five years earlier than the global deadline of 2030.

Bedaquiline is procured by the Indian government for its TB programme and is available in most TB clinics in large cities, but not in smaller towns and in rural areas. "Now, when the price of the generic version comes down, it will be much cheaper for the government to buy, and this will make it more accessible," said Venkatesan.

▲ Nandita Venkatesan, a journalist from Mumbai, is one of two campaigners who fought to make the TB drug affordable

She understood the argument made by Johnson & Johnson that the massive cost of developing a new drug has to be recouped through patents. "But their patent lasted 20 years. That's a good chunk. Why try to extend it? Why not be cognisant of the fact that lives are at stake?"

Nashville school shooter's identity may make them an exceptionally rare perpetrator

Ed Pilkington

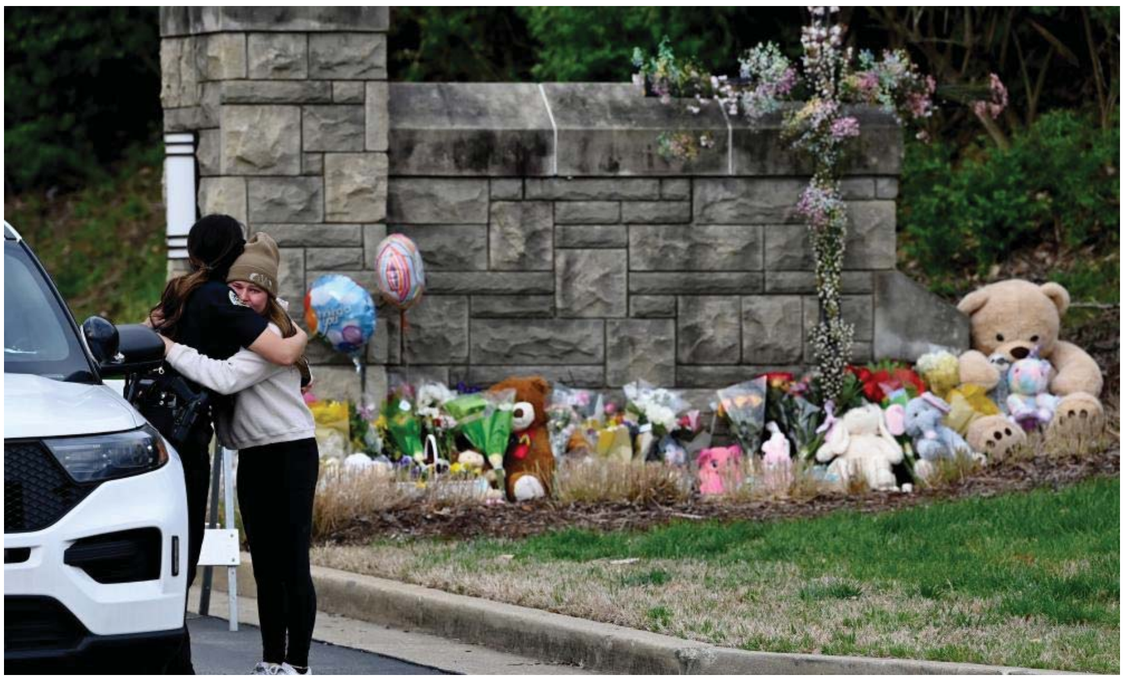
In the immediate aftermath of Monday's gun rampage at a private Christian school in Nashville, Tennessee, which left three nine-year-old children and three adults dead, local police described the shooter as a young female teenager.

Within hours that description had changed to that of a 28-year-old woman. And shortly after that, the authorities pivoted again, revealing that the shooter, Audrey Hale, had in recent times identified on social media, including a LinkedIn account, as a transgender male.

The swirl of identities for the Covenant school shooter was a product of the fog of confusion that commonly descends over the site of gun rampages in their instant wake. But in this case, it pointed to another factor – the shock that has followed an incident that, according to all recorded data, is exceptionally rare.

One of the rock-solid truths about the US epidemic of mass shootings is that these catastrophic events, which tear families and communities apart, are committed overwhelmingly by cis males. According to the Violence Project (TVP), men are responsible for carrying out more than 97% of all public mass shootings.

TVP, a non-partisan research group, tracks mass public shootings in the US stretching back to 1966. Its database defines such shootings relatively stringently as incidents in which four or more people are killed with a firearm in a public place.


▲ People hug at a makeshift memorial at the entrance to the Covenant school on Tuesday in Nashville, Tennessee. Photograph: Mark Zaleski/AP

Following this definition, there have been 190 such disasters in the past 57 years, and of those 185 were carried out by shooters who were assigned male at birth. Only five, including Hale, were assigned female at birth. Two committed the killing sprees alongside their male partners.

"Men perpetrate over 90% of homicides worldwide," said TVP's Jillian Peterson. "Explanations for this focus on a host of biological, social, economic and cultural factors, including societal expectations and gender roles. When it comes to mass shootings, perpetrators often see themselves in previous perpetrators and identify with them, which can contribute to copycat shootings."

The FBI has a slightly looser definition of what it calls "active shooter incidents" that focuses on individuals who engage in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. Its database records a larger number of cases – 277 between 2000 and 2018 alone – but even here the proportion of perpetrators assigned female at birth is very low – 12, or just 4% of the total.

The number of shooters who are trans or gender nonconforming is even rarer, placing Hale in an almost unique class. The only other member of this category known in recent years is the 22-year-old shooter who killed five people in a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs last November who, according to defense lawyers, is non-binary.

Dr Jason Silva, an assistant professor at William Paterson University who has co-authored one of the only studies of the small number of mass shooters who were assigned female at birth, noted that there is still scant understanding of why the overwhelming majority of mass shooters are cis male.

"We can think about the nature versus nurture argument – are men predominantly biologically driven toward aggression because of testosterone, or are they more been nurtured into being more violent through our culture and society? We don't have a definitive answer, but both seem plausible."

The exceedingly rare nature of a shooter who is anything other than cis male is unlikely to stop far-right agitators from seizing on Hale's trans identity to forward culture war objectives. Within hours of the shooting, Charlie Kirk, an extremist provocateur affiliated with Donald Trump, was calling for a ban on "gender affirming care for kids".

Such toxic responses to the shooting are likely to find fertile ground among some sectors of Tennessee society. The state's Republican leadership has been at the forefront of the movement to pass anti-trans legislation that has swept the US.

Earlier this month, Tennessee became the first state to ban drag shows. Its legislature is setting the pace for at least 16 other Republican-controlled states that are debating similarly draconian measures.

The links between pollution and miscarriage: 'This is the stuff nightmares are made of'

Isabelle Oderberg

Exactly 10 years ago this year, I sat in a Melbourne auditorium, listening to a lecture about conspiracy theories. One of the key points made by the speaker was that many of the great revelations in our world were once conspiracy theories confined to the fringes of society; think round earthers v flat earthers.

That's not to say that every conspiracy theory will be proven true. Clearly not. I don't for a moment believe Elvis is working in a 7-Eleven in Tucson, Arizona.

But there are some solid examples of critical issues being relegated to the fringes of society, and left there, because it suited the perpetrators of such damage to do so. Take tobacco and cigarettes as an example. For a long time, the idea that tobacco caused health issues was blamed on nutters intent on destroying everyone's good, smokey time. In truth, cigarette companies had scientific evidence by the 1950s that cigarette smoke was deadly, but Philip Morris didn't admit that publicly until about 40 years later.

Why were people so eager to believe Philip Morris, which had so much to gain from suppressing the dangerous truth? It's my fundamental belief they were able to get away with it so long because to most people, ignorance is bliss. No one wants to believe something they enjoy or something they can't control is killing them, right?

As I watched thick bushfire smoke blanket Sydney at the end of 2019, into the early months of 2020, I was already working on researching what eventually became my book on early pregnancy loss and miscarriage, Hard to Bear: Investigating the science and silence of miscarriage. Knowing the effects of particulate matter on the body, I wondered if pollution, whether extreme or "normal levels", might contribute to early pregnancy loss. It turns out that it does and that led to a story published in the Guardian and a podcast and later resulted in RANZCOG changing its guidelines for pregnancy in relation to pollution. But that's not where this issue ended, at least, not for me.

▲ *'It turns out that the world we live in is slowly poisoning every single one of us.' Photograph: Md Rafayat Haque Khan/Zuma Press Wire/ Shutterstock*

That was just the start of my deep dive into environmental toxicants and how they affect our body, our fertility and pregnancy. I'd always put much of this down to conspiracy theories and health nuts. Chemtrail weirdos. Because governments regulate chemicals and they have our best interests at heart, right? Right?

It turns out – and I'm sorry to be a Debbie Downer – that the world we live in is slowly poisoning every single one of us. And the chemicals doing the most damage are byproducts of the fossil fuel industry, agribusiness and manufacturing, and for many reasons there doesn't seem to be the appetite at a regulatory or governmental level to stop it. Sound familiar?

In Australia, 50,000 agricultural, industrial and veterinary chemicals are being used; 1,500 are suspected to interfere with endocrine function, which is essential to the healthy working of our reproductive and hormonal systems. Others are potential carcinogens that can cause cancer. Only a very small number have been tested.

Microplastics, which can cause inflammation in the body, is being found in our blood streams and also in the placentas of unborn foetuses. Walking down a major intersection during rush hour can expose you to as much particulate matter as a major bushfire event.

Even if chemicals are tested, the testing regimen means that chemicals are only being tested in isolation and not in conjunction with others to see how compounds react. Also, they might be tested for carcinogenic effects, for example, but the test subjects aren't monitored for other ill-effects, such as endocrine disruption. Or vice versa. Some effects take place long after the research has concluded. Some of these chemicals can stay in the body forever. Or affect the way our DNA functions.

Agricultural runoff from these chemicals is sliding into our waterways. One study showed that Queensland's Noosa River saw benthic biodiversity (the small organisms that live on the bottom of the riverbed) fall from 9,000 individuals and 150 species in 1998, to 1,114 individuals and 50 species in May 2018. If that was the decline in two decades, the trajectory means that pretty soon there won't be any river-life at all. And what is the effect of chemicals on humans living nearby?

There's no doubt you've seen plastic containers at the supermarket proudly bearing the label BPA-free. What that means is that they do not contain bisphenol A, a dangerous endocrine-disrupting chemical. Not only can it raise your risk profile in terms of miscarriage and early pregnancy loss, but it can have a wealth of other negative effects on physiology to humans, including those in utero. But what you don't know is that it's in lots of other places, including supermarket receipts. Despite us knowing about its ill-effects for more than 15 years, only late last year did the big chain supermarkets undertake to remove it from receipts that are being handled by their staff hundreds of times a day and by their customers too.

The way we test and regulate chemicals that are freely available in this country for a range of purposes must be immediately overhauled for the safety of the population and the biosphere we depend on.

A recurring theme of novels set in dystopian futures is infertility: think The Handmaid's Tale or The Children of Men. The reality is that these books are a blueprint for the future unless we turn this ship around.

Every single expert I spoke to in the context of my research on miscarriage said that while we're not tracking miscarriage numbers, they believe miscarriage rates are rising. These are not crackpots. These are world-renowned obstetricians and endocrinologists from Columbia University, Yale, Imperial College in London and right here in Australia.

Shanna Swan is a professor of environmental medicine at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. Her research shows that sperm counts in the west fell by 59% between 1973 and 2011. Studies are showing declines in fertility around the world, and in Australia annual rounds of IVF initiated each year are rising by around 2-3% annually, though from 2015-19, there was an 11% jump. Between 2018 and 2019, it jumped more than 6%.

There's even an Australian website (not widely enough publicised) called yourfertility.org.au. It was set up by the Fertility Coalition, which includes the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority, Healthy Male, Jean Hailes for Women's Health, Monash University and the University of Adelaide. It has an entire section on chemicals in our environment and what to avoid, stating that "avoiding these chemicals may increase the chance of having a baby".

There's no doubt the climate crisis is well and truly on the worldwide agenda, no longer regarded as a fringe theory, but as an absolute truth that we need to act on immediately. Part of that discussion needs to be the toxicants being stealthily pumped into our everyday lives and the effects they are having on our bodies.

This is the stuff nightmares are made of; indeed, I dived so deep only because it was keeping me awake at night. Despite easing up my research as I came to the end of writing my book, I'm still not sleeping any better. We must address this as a matter of urgency if we want our grandkids to have a world to live in – or if we want grandkids at all.

Isabelle Oderberg is the author of Hard to Bear: Investigating the science and silence of miscarriage, published by Ultimo Press and available now

US charges Sam Bankman-Fried with bribing Chinese officials

Reuters

US prosecutors on Tuesday unveiled a new indictment against Sam Bankman-Fried, accusing the founder of now-bankrupt FTX cryptocurrency exchange of conspiring to bribe Chinese government officials with $40m worth of payments.

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan charged Bankman-Fried with directing the payment in order to unfreeze accounts belonging to his hedge fund, Alameda Research, that Chinese authorities had frozen. The accounts held more than $1bn of cryptocurrency, US prosecutors said.

▲ *Sam Bankman-Fried in New York City on 3 January. Photograph: David Dee Delgado/ Reuters*

The accounts were unfrozen after the bribe payment was transferred around November 2021 from Alameda's main trading account to a private cryptocurrency wallet, according to the new indictment.

After the accounts were unfrozen, Bankman-Fried authorized a transfer of tens of millions of dollars of additional cryptocurrency to complete the bribe, prosecutors said.

The new charge increases the pressure on the 31-year-old former billionaire, who had previously pleaded not guilty to eight counts over the collapse of FTX. Prosecutors say Bankman-Fried stole billions of dollars in customer funds to plug Alameda losses.

Lawyers for Bankman-Fried did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Bankman-Fried has acknowledged inadequate risk management at FTX, but has denied stealing money.

China's foreign ministry could not immediately be reached after normal business hours in Beijing.

District judge Lewis Kaplan scheduled a court hearing for Thursday after prosecutors asked for Bankman-Fried to be arraigned on the new 13-count indictment.

Prosecutors last month unveiled four new counts against Bankman-Fried, accusing him of orchestrating an illegal campaign donation scheme to buy influence in Washington DC. He has not yet been arraigned on the new charges.

Continued *on page 25*

Continued *from page 24*

The new count accuses Bankman-Fried of conspiring to violate the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), which makes it illegal for US citizens to bribe foreign government officials to win business.

Bankman-Fried is currently confined to his parents' Palo Alto, California, home on $250m bond ahead of his 2 October trial.

On Monday, his lawyers and prosecutors reached a new agreement on revised bail conditions, after Kaplan raised the prospect of sending Bankman-Fried to jail pending trial. That came after prosecutors raised concerns he may have been tampering with witnesses.

Adidas asks US to bar Black Lives Matter from using three stripes in trademark

Reuters

Sneaker giant Adidas AG has asked the US trademark office to reject an application for a Black Lives Matter trademark featuring three parallel stripes, arguing it could mislead the public.

Adidas told the office in a Monday filing that Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation Inc's yellow-stripe design would create confusion with its own famous three-stripe mark. It sought to block the group's application to use the design on goods that the German sportswear maker also sells, such as shirts, hats and bags.

Adidas declined to comment on the filing. Representatives for the Black Lives Matter group did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

Adidas said in the filing that it has been using its logo since as early as 1952, and that it has acquired "international fame and tremendous public recognition".

▲ *The Adidas logo and that of the BLM Global Network Foundation. Composite: AP / Black Lives Matter organization*

Adidas has filed more than 90 lawsuits and signed more than 200 settlement agreements related to the three-stripe trademark since 2008, according to court documents from a lawsuit the company brought against designer Thom Browne's fashion house.

A jury in that case decided in January that Thom Browne's stripe patterns did not violate Adidas' trademark rights.

The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation is the most prominent entity in the decentralized Black Lives Matter movement, which arose a decade ago to protest police violence against Black people. The group applied for a federal trademark in November 2020 covering a yellow three-stripe design to use on a variety of products including clothing, publications, bags, bracelets and mugs.

Adidas said in its Monday filing that the group's design was confusingly similar to its logo, and that consumers would likely think their goods were connected or came from the same source.

The trademark office gave the Black Lives Matter group until 6 May to answer.

UK government drops plans for NFT made by Royal Mint

Alex Hern

The UK government has dropped its plans to produce a non-fungible token for sale through the Royal Mint, just under a year after it first announced the project.

In response to a question from the Conservative MP Harriett Baldwin, the Treasury's economic secretary, Andrew Griffith, confirmed the abandonment, saying: "In consultation with HM Treasury, the Royal Mint is not proceeding with the launch of a non-fungible token at this time but will keep this proposal under review."

Tulip Siddiq, the shadow City minister, welcomed the decision. "I'm glad that the Royal Mint has finally made the Conservatives see sense, but we've been calling on the chancellor to drop this crypto gimmick for months," she said.

"This out-of-touch government should be focused on the cost of living crisis, not wasting time and taxpayers' money on an NFT vanity project and promoting dodgy stablecoins."

In April 2022, the Treasury had asked the Mint to create the token. At the time, it said it "shows the forward-

▲ *Rishi Sunak backed cryptocurrencies when chancellor, including the plan for a UK government NFT. Photograph: Reuters*

looking approach we are determined to take towards crypto assets in the UK".

There is little to show for almost 12 months of work. The Mint did not produce a visualisation of what the proposed non-fungible token would look like, or any technical explanation of how it would work, what it would offer users, and what blockchain infrastructure it would be built on.

The announcement of an NFT, from the then chancellor, Rishi Sunak, came just weeks before the bubble popped, and within a month, the Treasury was having to defend its plans in the face of a collapse in value of all cryptocurrencies after the failure of the Terra/UST "algorithmic stablecoin".

Since then, a slow-motion crisis has embroiled the sector, with FTX, Celsius, Voyager and Genesis filing for bankruptcy alongside crypto-focused banks Silvergate and Signature and Binance, the leading crypto exchange, facing an investigation from US regulators.

In his time as chancellor, Sunak positioned the UK government firmly behind cryptocurrencies, launching a taskforce in 2021 to investigate whether the Bank of England should create a "central bank digital currency". He described the plan as one "for a more open, greener, and more technologically advanced financial services sector. The UK is already known for being at the forefront of innovation, but we need to go further."

But the crypto collapse means that the most important project actually completed by the Treasury has been a very different look at the sector: a May 2022 consultation on managing the failure of cryptocurrencies. In it, the Treasury proposed new regulations to protect the holders of "stablecoins" such as UST, treating the digital currencies more like a bank than a payment service. "The failure of a systemic [cryptocurrency] firm could have a wide range of financial stability as well as consumer protection impacts," the Treasury said.

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China spent $240bn on belt and road bailouts from 2008 to 2021, study finds

Amy Hawkins

▲ A construction vehicle prepares the ground before the installation of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line, a project of the belt and road initiative, connecting the Greek port of Piraeus with eastern Europe. Photograph: Attila Kisbenedek/AFP/Getty Images

China spent $240bn (£195bn) bailing out countries struggling under their belt and road initiative debts between 2008 and 2021, new data shows.

Research found that Chinese state-backed lenders released bailout funds to 22 countries, including Argentina, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Ukraine. Almost 80% of the emergency rescue lending was issued after 2016, reaching more than $40bn in 2021.

The increase in emergency financing since 2016 correlates with a drop in Chinese lending for infrastructure projects that are part of the belt and road initiative. Commitments from China's two main institutional lenders, China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China (China Exim), fell from a peak of $87bn in 2016 to $3.7bn in 2021, according to data analysed by Boston University.

The failure of several infrastructure projects and the debt problems experienced by several recipient countries, hurt by the rising costs of servicing their loans, has forced a recalibration of China's overseas development programme.

However, the war in Ukraine, the Covid-19 pandemic, supply chain problems and rising interest rates have contributed to a global economic crisis that has created difficulties for lenders of all kinds. China's willingness to issue emergency financing may also therefore be an "acknowledgement that the belt and road initiative is as much about relationship-building as it is about infrastructure", said Cobus van Staden, the managing editor of the China-Global South Project website.

"This lending will cement these relationships and make China even more central to [developing countries'] future economic trajectories."

The share of Beijing's overseas lending directed to borrowers in financial distress increased from 5% in 2010 to 60% in 2022, according to the study by researchers at AidData, the World Bank, the Harvard Kennedy School, and the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

Bradley Parks, one of the report's authors, said: "Emergency rescue lending is a very risky business. If you bail out borrowers that are in default or teetering on the edge of default, the challenge is knowing whether your borrower faces a short-term liquidity problem or a long-term solvency problem".

Middle-income countries represent 80% of China's total overseas lending, so Chinese banks have a particular incentive to make sure those governments remain sufficiently liquid to keep servicing debts related to belt and road infrastructure projects. Low-income countries account for less of Chinese banks' total risk, so are more likely to be offered debt restructuring.

Because China is often the biggest bilateral creditor for low- and middle-income countries, Chinese assistance is crucial for countries in debt distress. In March the International Monetary Fund approved a long-awaited bailout for Sri Lanka worth almost $3bn after China Exim provided assurances that it would offer financial assistance to Colombo.

But Chinese support is not cheap. The study's authors found that the average interest rate attached to a Chinese rescue loan was 5%, compared with 2% for a typical rescue loan from the IMF.

Chinese rescue lending is overwhelmingly directed at countries that already have high levels of debt to China. Carmen Reinhart, one of the study's authors, said: "Beijing is ultimately trying to rescue its own banks. That's why it has gotten into the risky business of international bailout lending."

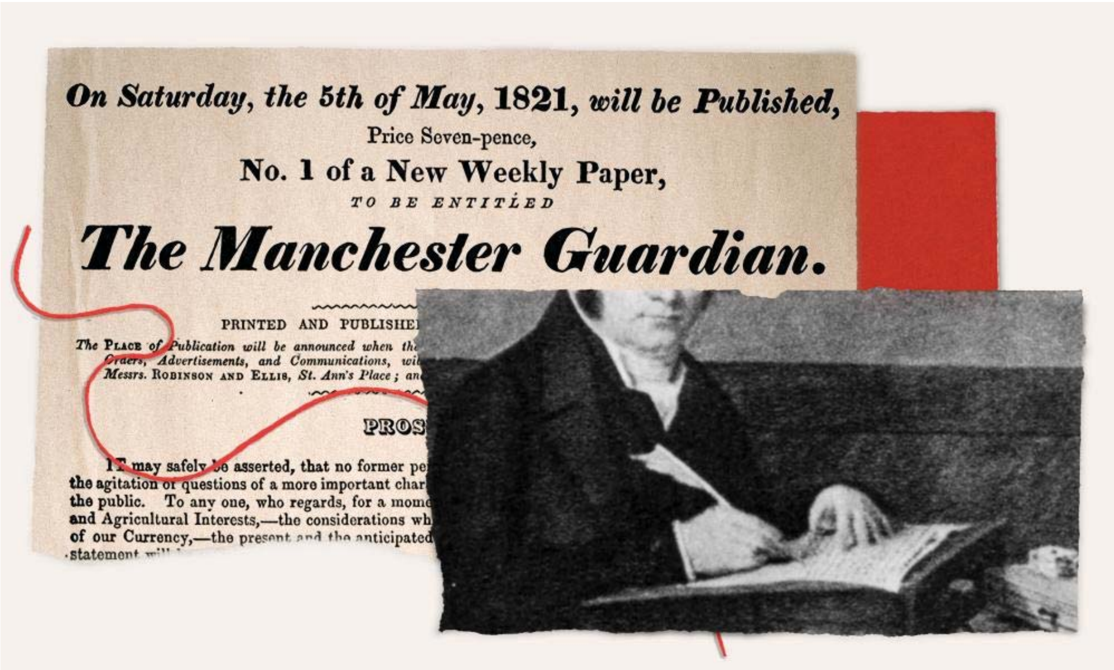
Some countries, such as Argentina, have effectively received continuous rollovers of Chinese rescue loans. This means that although loans may be booked as reaching maturity within 12 months, in practice they can be extended for several years.

Such practices are one of the many reasons that credit rating agencies and international institutions find it harder to monitor Chinese loans than those from multilateral lenders. The "serial rollovers" mean that governments in receipt of Chinese loans can underreport their public debt exposure, because international reporting rules only mandate the disclosure of debts with repayment terms of more than one year.

The massive growth in Chinese lending means that the global financial system is "more multipolar, less institutionalised, and less transparent," said Christoph Trebesch, another of the report's authors. "We see clear historical parallels to when the US started its rise as a global financial power, from the 1930s onwards and especially after world war two."

The Guardian view on our links to slavery: a necessary reckoning with the past

Editorial



▲ The prospectus (left) that publicised the launch of the Manchester Guardian in 1821, and a section of a portrait of John Edward Taylor, founder of The Guardian. Composite: Guardian

The Guardian has long been considered a champion of progressive values, rooted in a northern English radical tradition. So it will come as a shock to many that much of the wealth of the Manchester Guardian's founder, John Edward Taylor, and that of most of his backers was connected to transatlantic slavery. A two-year-long investigation has shown that Taylor traded in slave-picked US cotton and that one of his funders enslaved people. Now, recognising this historical injustice, the Scott Trust – which owns the Guardian – has offered an apology for our involvement in this crime against humanity and pledges itself to a decade-long programme of restorative justice. This is a moral commitment to the "understanding that the past cannot be erased, and must not be ignored", as the historian Olivette Otele writes.

That history begins by seeing the Guardian shorn of idealist illusions. Like many Georgians, the paper dressed in an air of respectability and saw itself as a mouthpiece for much-needed political reform. This image conceals the economic interests of its founders, which were hiding in plain sight. In April 1821, a month before the first Manchester Guardian was published, Taylor said that his newspaper would "supply that information on [cotton manufacture], the deficiency of which is often so obviously apparent". In this guise, the Guardian had progressive values, but it was also a lobbyist for slave-produced cotton, which at that time constituted two-thirds of Britain's cotton imports.

Making windows into people's souls is not easy from two centuries away. But it is hard not to see the editorial positions that the Guardian took in its early decades as shaped by commercial interests. In the name of economic liberalism, the Guardian backed free trade and free labour. The former justified the offshoring of slavery, and its inhumane institutions, to America and Brazil, where events were seen through a cotton merchant's eyes. The latter allowed, against a backdrop of slave rebellions in the West Indies, the contention that subjugation was inefficient. The paper argued for the destruction and displacement of British mercantilism by industrial capitalism.

Having abolished the slave trade in 1807, Britain saw itself as a light in the world. This was cognitive dissonance. By then, British ships had transported more than 3 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic. Another 700,000 people in the West Indies remained in chains. While the Royal Navy blockaded the coasts of west Africa, many more ships were transporting slave-produced goods from North and South America to British ports. The paper's equivocal positions on the American

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civil war – stressing the aggression of Abraham Lincoln's Union against the Confederate south – reflected both cotton interests and the paper's disdain for more radical abolitionist prescriptions. The wealth extracted from American slaves flowed mainly to a few cities such as Manchester. By the 1830s, Cottonopolis was born, helping to enrich further the founder and backers of the Guardian.

Britain was built on slavery and colonialism. These have moulded our culture and institutions, and hence shaped our politics. The Guardian has begun a reckoning with its history. Others – individuals, institutions and states – should follow. Restorative justice would help to make sense of the complexity of a colonial past. It should focus on education and civic participation so that current and future generations can address climate change, health inequalities and systemic racism. Without understanding our past, it becomes harder to grasp what the present means and what the future holds. "We have to guard not only against … old prejudices but also against the new which are being constantly created," wrote Eric Williams, the historian and first prime minister of Trinidad. "No age is exempt."

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com

The Guardian view on Israel's political crisis: not over yet

Editorial

There is no room for relief. Benjamin Netanyahu's assault on Israel's democratic institutions is not over; it is merely on pause. After nearly three months of political crisis, popular outrage and mounting protests, the prime minister was forced to suspend his attack on the judiciary. He has already caused serious damage to the economy and the state through a headlong charge at the supreme court's independence, which was opposed by most Israelis. Though he said that he was "not willing to tear the nation in half", his primary motivation is not saving the country, but himself.

Mr Netanyahu, who has corruption charges hanging over him, has no love for the judiciary. And though the court has repeatedly undercut Palestinian rights in the West Bank and helped to entrench the occupation, the prime minister's far-right coalition partners are angered by even its modest rulings outlawing Israeli settlements. They are unlikely to back down. Mr Netanyahu's best hope is that the protests' momentum ebbs over Passover and in the weeks that follow.

The determination of his opponents was aided by Mr Netanyahu's unusual political ineptness. He failed to set out an appealing case for the reforms. Weeks away from the country's 75th anniversary, its president, Isaac Herzog, warned that Israel could be approaching civil war after his compromise plan failed. Then came an unforced error: firing the defence minister, Yoav Gallant, who had urged pausing the legislation, given the turmoil it had caused in the military, with reservists saying they would refuse to serve. Tens of thousands more protesters took to the streets. Bank bosses, tech entrepreneurs and trade union leaders agreed to a mass strike. Israel's consul general in New York resigned. Flights were grounded, nurseries closed their doors and hospitals handled only emergencies.

▲ Benjamin Netanyahu … 'His staunchest opponents, as well as former allies, know to their cost that he is a formidable political survivor and dealmaker.' Photograph: Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

The far right's price for Monday night's climbdown was an agreement that the minister of security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, could set up a new "national guard" under his control. Whether or not it materialises, sceptics note that Mr Ben-Gvir is bigger on rhetoric than delivery, and that Mr Netanyahu will not want him to have his own armed power base – the pledge to hand a man convicted of inciting racism a militia of his own is inherently horrifying.

The danger now is that the prime minister may up his political game rather than lowering his ambitions, moving more slowly and thus, perhaps, more effectively. He could back off – for now – on allowing the Knesset to override the supreme court with a simple majority, while pushing ahead on increasing political control of judicial selection and preventing the court from having oversight of basic laws – elements that have already passed a first reading.

His staunchest opponents, as well as former allies, know to their cost that he is a formidable political survivor and dealmaker. Yet he is undeniably weakened by the last few weeks. The extremity of his coalition reflects the fact that he has run out of people to work with, and polls show a dramatic reversal in its fortunes. Only sustained pressure will see off this threat to Israel's already limited checks and balances. Mr Netanyahu will persist. Will those standing against him?

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves review – passable, playful adventure

Benjamin Lee

Even with a surprise resurgence in the popularity of the immersive, exhausting role-playing fantasy game Dungeons & Dragons (2017 saw more players of the game than any other year in its entire existence), betting a reported $150m on a new franchise-starting film is a risky, borderline reckless, move, like betting on a regular goblin against a hobgoblin in a magic sorcery battle (note: I have never played Dungeons & Dragons before). As acceptably engaging as Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves might be, it's hard to fully understand the thinking behind such a wild gambit, especially given that a splashy Paramount+ TV series is also in the works, the success of one film immediately dictating the existence of an entire extended universe.

While other more mainstreamed franchises have touched upon loosely similar fantasy territory, from Game of Thrones to Lord of the Rings, there's more of a niche, loaded quality to D&D that could prevent a similar trajectory, an association with hardcore geek culture that might be hard to shake for the average multiplex-frequenter. It's not as if those behind the film aren't also acutely aware of this as well, hiring the duo behind Game Night, Horrible Bosses and Spider-man: Homecoming to bring some pop and levity, aiming to give the film a Guardians of the Galaxy-esque irreverence, something the cool kids could enjoy just as much. It's a passable attempt at such and one which is made all the more passable by context, comparing it with recent Marvel and DC films making it seem that much better but is that enough to warrant such lofty universe-starting investment?

▲ Michelle Rodriguez and Chris Pine in Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves. Photograph: Aidan Monaghan

As well as nabbing writer-directors Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley, who helped reinvent Spider-man, they've also cast in the lead Chris Pine, who helped steer the Star Trek reboot to widespread prosperity. He transplants some of that same cocky charm to his role here, playing a thief who turned his back on a more respectable life once his wife was murdered. Together with partner-in-crime

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Holga (Michelle Rodriguez doing exactly what you expect Michelle Rodriguez to do in a franchise movie such as this, which isn't a bad thing), they are forced into an elaborate plan to recover his child after a heist goes wrong. It's then superhero assemblage formula with them travelling to pick up Justice Smith's wannabe sorcerer and Sophia Lillis's druid while getting extra assistance from Regé-Jean Page's paladin. Together they must defeat Hugh Grant's power-hungry con artist and Daisy Head's red wizard.

If the film hewing so closely to Marvel beats is frustrating it's also entirely inevitable, the superhero factory having an indelible impact on how the industry treats the majority of colon-heavy tentpole properties. But the upside is that by aping a genre that has been going through a significant downturn in quality, doing the bare minimum is then somehow doing quite a lot. A coherent plot, well-choreographed action, real locations, some practical effects and a self-contained story not set in a multiverse make it easy-to-digest, the level for entry not requiring quite as much knowledge of post-credit scenes and a myriad of Disney+ TV shows. The script does a solid job of making it an accessible world to those not already steeped in it although Goldstein and Daley, writing alongside Michael Gilio, are less effective with the film's many attempts at comedy.

It's a shame as the cast are game and Pine and Rodriguez have a fizzy platonic chemistry but it's just never as funny as it should be despite ample set-ups, like a striker missing multiple hard-to-miss opportunities to score, leading to similar head-in-hands moments. There are momentary flashes of something sharper, as if a storied sitcom writer was allowed a day's worth of touch-ups, such as a charmingly silly sequence involving reanimated corpses, but the film needed more genuine laughs to work as the high-spirited romp it so clearly wants to be. Brazenly stealing Dave Bautista's inability to understand humour from Guardians and lazily giving it to Page, an action scene involving a fat dragon and a bizarre cameo from an A-lister that's just one dumb overextended sight gag distract from what's otherwise mostly well-paced and energetic.

It's the missing bit of magic in a serviceable franchise-starter that benefits from the very low bar we currently have. Whether that enjoyed-on-a-plane level of disposability is quite enough to warrant the beginning of a new multi-platform universe is to be confirmed very soon (the film is tracking to open low this weekend) but if future instalments are to happen, we could do with a little more funny to go with that fun.

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves is out in cinemas on 31 March

'A portrait of defeat': inside a revealing film about Pope Francis

Radheyan Simonpillai

A lot is said during the quiet moments in Gianfranco Rosi's In Viaggio: The Travels of Pope Francis, when the holy figure takes a pause from giving hopeful or apologetic speeches to stare into the abyss, lost in his own thoughts and prayers. Those are opportunities for Rosi, the documentary film-maker behind Fire at Sea and Notturno, to invite the audience into contemplation and leave room for skepticism and ambivalence.

"The silence for me is more important than the notes itself," Rosi tells the Guardian over a Zoom call from Manhattan. "My own interpretation as a film-maker is to give space to silence. Sometimes words aren't even enough."

He occasionally uses those contemplative sections to cut away to scenes of recent devastation or historical oppression, as if weighing all the ceremoniousness put on by the papal office against the suffering the church has had a hand in or has done nothing functional to remedy. In Viaggio often feels like it's measuring the value in the current pope's radical efforts to modernize Catholicism and reach the masses. Whether those efforts come up short depends on who's watching and how much faith they have in religion and humanity.

Early in the film, we hear a distress call from refugees on a sinking boat near the Italian island of Lampedusa, where Fire at Sea was shot. Their cries for help are not answered by the divine but instead a coastguard asking for the sinking vessel's position. Rosi explains that the repeated question, "what's your position?" is meant to hang over the film, provoking consideration of where we stand when it comes to religious and political matters

Rosi is sitting by the window in the same Meatpacking District apartment he's had since attending film school at New York University in the 80s.

▲ *Pope Francis disembarks from his plane upon arrival in Rio de Janeiro. Photograph: Luca Zennaro/AFP/Getty Images*

He's wearing an all-black ensemble with matching hat and tinted frames. The Italian film-maker, born in Eritrea, can easily pass as a Milan fashion designer, speaking with a heavy accent and big hand gestures while a green marker is nestled between his fingers. He occasionally scribbles down notes – points that he wants to return to in our conversation without interrupting his current train of thought.

By his own admission, Rosi is secular. The director largely keeps his own beliefs (or lack thereof) at bay in a film that dutifully follows Pope Francis to war-ravaged countries and traumatized communities, where he steps up to podiums to offer words meant to inspire or heal. As usual with Rosi, there are no voiceover narrations or talking head interviews. Instead, the film just acts as witness to three dozen trips the pope embarked on over the past decade, observing his work and his words, admiring his progressive stance on gay marriage, prison reform and the climate, without shying away from the fissures and contradictions. Rosi couches passages where the pope condemns war and the arms trade with shots of fighter jets escorting his plane and military processions that greet him in places such the US and Dubai.

Contradictions and secularism aside, there's a genuine fondness and admiration Rosi has for the pope, felt in both his film and our midday Zoom call. "The first meeting I had with the pope, he gave me a rosary," Rosi recalls. "I said, 'I'm not really a believer.' He said, 'just keep it, it's good for you.' He has a very good sense of humour."

That initial meeting took place at the Vatican after the pope had seen Fire at Sea, Rosi's Oscar-nominated look at the migration crisis in Lampedusa. The pope had been close to that issue, having visited Lampedusa just months after taking up the papacy in 2013. In 2021, Rosi reconnected with the Vatican after the pope visited Iraq. The film-maker had just spent three years in the war-torn area to make his 2020 documentary Notturno. Rosi was starting to see his work overlapping with Pope Francis's itinerary.

Between Lampedusa and Baghdad, the pope had made 34 trips abroad, including a visit to Juárez, Mexico, where Rosi had shot 2010's El Sicario, Room 164. That's what inspired Rosi to curate the Vatican's travelogue materials along with news and historical archives, and some of his own footage from El Sicario and Notturno. His film would observe the pope as he observed the world. "We could draw a map of the human condition," says Rosi.

The film-maker also travelled alongside the pope to Canada last summer, when the latter apologized to Indigenous communities for the genocide aided and enabled by the church. The pope's apology tour in Canada took place after remains of thousands of Indigenous children forcibly removed from their communities throughout the past two centuries were uncovered at mass burial sites at residential schools run by priests and nuns. His visit was a contentious one.

In a conversation about justice and reconciliation, the film-maker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers discussed the pope's visit with the Women Talking director, Sarah Polley. They discussed the anger and vindication felt and the power differential between the wealthy and protected church doing the apologizing and the vulnerable Indigenous communities, some still fighting for clean water, who received it. "Some people felt a sense of healing to hear this man apologize on behalf of this institution," Tailfeathers told Polley. "Others felt ambivalent. Here's another spectacle from an institution like the Catholic church, wherein we're expected to accept an apology. And then they leave and nothing changes."

Rosi sensed that overwhelming ambivalence during his visit. "I knew that people weren't accepting [his apology]," he says. That's why he decided to shoot the apology out of focus. The pope's words are heard across this blur, as though it's some hazy abstract concept in his mind that hasn't really taken hold. "This was a moment of suspension," says Rosi. "There was still something that is not finished."

Rosi had a meeting with the pope just five days before our interview. He relays the pope's parting words to him: "Be courageous and take risks. There are too many conservative people around us." It's fascinating advice from a figure whose risks often feel calculated and safe.

Throughout the film, we see the

▲ *Pope Francis looks on at a square near the ruins of the Syriac Catholic church of the Immaculate Conception (al-Tahira-l-Kubra), in the old city of Mosul in northern Iraq. Photograph: Vincenzo Pinto/AFP/Getty Images*

pope celebrated for publicly denouncing the Indigenous and Armenian genocides. He takes a much more cautious approach when visiting Palestine and Sri Lanka (not seen in the film). In those places, the language around violence and human rights abuses can be much more contentious. Using words like genocide, as some have referred to Sri Lanka's bombardment of Tamil civilians in 2009 near the end of a 25-year civil war, isn't as generally accepted.

Rosi expresses his own disappointment that the pope has stayed silent as women in Iran protest over Masha Amini's 2022 death at the hand's of the country's so-called morality police. He believes there's an unspoken complication preventing the pope from speaking out that involves Iran's ties to Iraq, where a vulnerable Christian population remains.

Despite all his courageous words and conviction, Rosi argues, the pope is a head of state who is protected by armed guards, escorted by the occasional fighter jet, and guided by diplomacy (as well as the holy spirit) when he speaks, or stays quiet.

"The film," Rosi says, "is also a portrait of defeat."

In Viaggio: The Travels of Pope Francis is out in US cinemas on 31 March and in the UK at a later date

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Colbert on Trump protests: 'Less Jan 6 and more Jan and six of her friends'

Guardian staff

▲ Stephen Colbert on Trump's arrest prediction: 'His most inaccurate forecast since every time he said 'til death do us part.' Photograph: YouTube

Stephen Colbert

On the Late Show, Stephen Colbert also addressed Trump's incorrect arrest prediction, "making this his most inaccurate forecast since every time he said 'til death do us part'".

In response to the possible charges, Trump urged his followers to take to the streets in protest. A handful did outside Trump Tower in Manhattan, a weak display Colbert described as "less Jan 6 and more 'Jan and six of her friends.'"

As one observer put it: "It's just a bunch of cameras taking pictures of a guy who is putting on a rat suit next to a guitar with the words Hang Fauci on it."

"So … Rudy was there?" Colbert quipped.

At a rally in Waco, Texas, Trump described himself as "the most innocent man in the history of this country, friends of mine say that".

"Those have got to be the two biggest lies he's ever told: he's the most innocent man in history and that he has friends," Colbert retorted.

Trump also bragged about the Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, his main rival for the GOP's 2024 presidential nomination, begging for his endorsement in 2018: "I endorsed him and he became like a rocketship."

"Um, I don't know about rocket," said Colbert. "If you look at him, he actually has the aerodynamics of a kegerator."

Seth Meyers

Seth Meyers returned to Late Night after a week of vacation, during which time Donald Trump teased a possible arrest for campaign finance violations that's still pending a grand jury decision on charges. "It could happen at any moment or, knowing Trump's luck, maybe never," said Meyers. "Somehow Trump always escapes accountability.

"At this point, I wouldn't be surprised if Merrick Garland just put himself in jail," he added of the attorney general, because "it just seems easier".

The possible charges stem from Trump's hush money payment to the porn star Stormy Daniels in the final weeks of the 2016 presidential campaign, and "as far as criminal cases go, this one seems pretty open and shut to me", said Meyers, with testimony from Trump's ex-fixer Michael Cohen, a physical copy of the check signed by Trump and a clip of Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani admitting the crime on Fox News.

"I feel like it would definitely be better to charge him with other stuff first," said Meyers. "You know, like the coup. Don't get me wrong, the hush money payment is also against the law and he should be held accountable, but it would be a bummer if this were the only thing he gets indicted for. On the other hand, it's also a bummer that we have a former president who's under multiple criminal investigations.

"It's not like Trump did this decades ago and it's just getting dredged up now," he added. "He broke campaign finance laws and defrauded the electorate in the final weeks of a presidential campaign in order to become the most powerful man on earth."

Even crazier, Meyers continued, was that "he probably didn't have to. Knowing what we know now about his loyal fan base, Trump probably could've gotten up on a stage at a rally in October 2016 and said: 'I banged a porn star!'"

Jimmy Kimmel

In Los Angeles, Jimmy Kimmel recapped Trump's rally in Waco on the 30th anniversary of the siege in which 86 people died. "You know if that happened now he'd side with the Branch Davidians, right?" said Kimmel. "He'd be like, 'I like David Koresh, he likes me, that's a good thing not a bad thing.'"

Trump chose Waco "because it's a powerful metaphor for his campaign", Kimmel added. "He's going down in flames and he's taking his cult followers with him."

Trump also took potshots at Daniels, calling her "horse face" and also saying they never had an affair. "Just to be clear: he didn't do it, he wouldn't do it, but if he had done it, he wouldn't have done it with her," said Kimmel.

Daniels, meanwhile, responded to a tweet saying Trump wouldn't touch her with a 10ft pole with "True. He used a 3in one," and "won the day", said Kimmel.

The Daily Show

And on the Daily Show, guest host John Leguizamo also mocked Trump, AKA "the man so bad at sex he pays people not to talk about it".

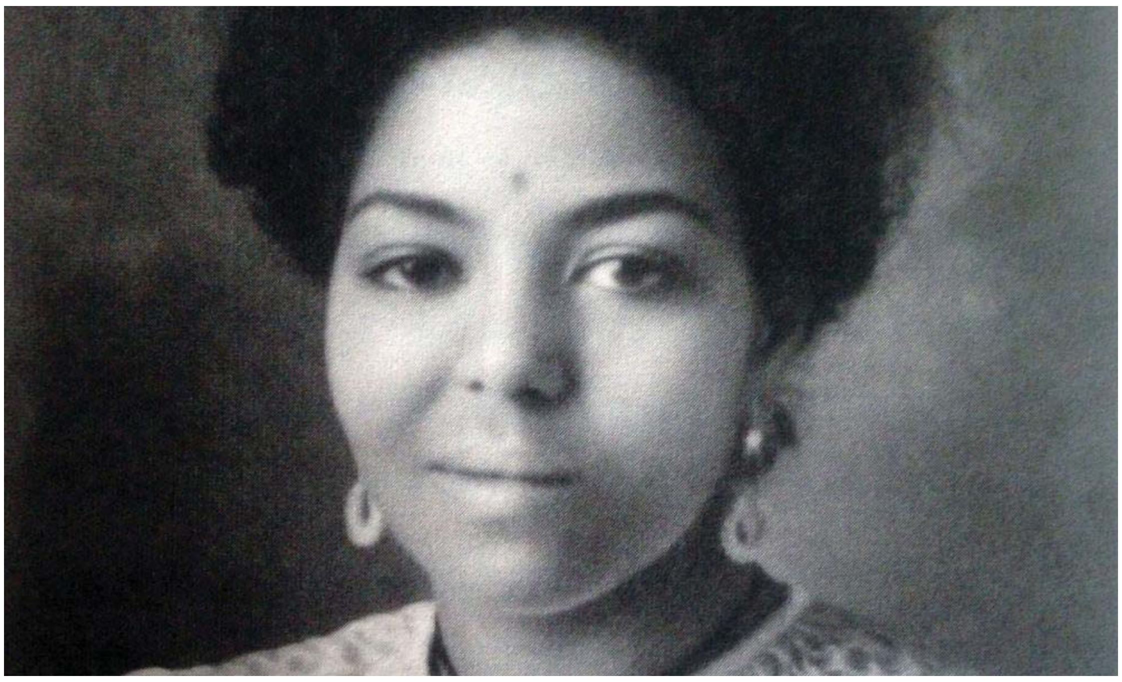
At his rally in Waco, Trump attempted to both mock Daniels and distance himself from her, saying: "That wouldn't be the one. There is no one. We have a great First Lady."

"Wow, nice save bro," said Leguizamo. "You could actually see his brain try to turn the car around that his mouth was driving. 'I didn't have an affair, and I've never had an affair, and I've actually never had sex, did you know that? I'm a virgin and the best and biggest virgin, ever.'

"I love that Trump is running for office and from the law at the same time. How great is that?" Leguizamo added of the rally, supposedly Trump's kick-off event for his 2024 campaign. "He's going to be the first presidential candidate giving speeches from his getaway car."

Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou: the Ethiopian nun who was one of history's most distinctive pianists

John Lewis


▲ Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou, pictured aged 23. Photograph: Kate Molleson

The music of the pianist Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou, who has died at the age of 99, seemed to reflect every area of her extraordinary life. A daughter of Addis Ababa's upper classes, she was immersed in Ethiopian traditional song, then trained in classical violin and piano, embraced early jazz and later took holy orders. So it's quite fitting that her compositions were a curious fusion of *fin de siècle* parlour piano, gospel, ragtime, Ethiopian folk music and the choral traditions of the country's Orthodox church. A BBC radio documentary on her work was entitled The Honky Tonk Nun, and it seemed to sum up the paradoxical nature of her music – a mix of high and low art, sacred and profane, precise notation and free improvisation.

Emahoy might have remained unknown to the outside world were it not for the French musicologist Francis Falceto, who worked with the record label Buda Music to release an album of her archive recordings in 2006. It was part of a series of compilation albums of Ethiopian music entitled Éthiopiques. The series was a revelation, even to many people who thought they were familiar with Africa's best music. Where there are certain instruments, rhythms, scales and voicings that are shared by several different regions around the continent, the music of Ethiopia – one of the world's oldest Christian civilisations – stands distinct and discrete from anything in neighbouring countries.

Emahoy's best-known contemporaries and compatriots, who also featured on the Éthiopiques series, were jazz and funk musicians such as Mulatu Astatke, Hailu Mergia and Mahmoud Ahmed, whose mix of shuffling, dis-

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jointed rhythms, seductive vocals and sizzling wah-wah guitar riffs remain a source of fascination. But Emahoy's spartan solo piano recordings didn't quite fit under the ambit of jazz. Compositions such as The Homeless Wanderer, Homesickness and Mother's Love (several of which are now familiar from TV advertisements) were quizzical, stately, delightfully odd pieces pitched somewhere between Keith Jarrett, Erik Satie, Scott Joplin and Professor Longhair.

They use a series of pentatonic scales, or *kignits*, which are the building blocks of all Ethiopian music, from its ancient liturgical chants to its folk songs and funky pop music. These five-note scales are similar but musicologically quite distinct from Arabic *maqams* or Indian modes. They have names like the *anchihoye*, the *tizita* and the *bati*, and most have major and minor-key variations (some, like the *ambassel*, don't have a minor or major third at all, and so have a wonderfully ambiguous, open-ended feel). Emahoy's piano playing manipulated these modes to draw us in and hypnotise us, like a snake charmer with a *pungi*.

Her signature style on the piano was metrical and precise. All improvising pianists try to "bend" notes in some way, but Emahoy had a very distinctive way of doing it. She didn't slur or slide or crunch the keys like a blues or boogie-woogie pianist might, but instead played very crisp trills that gave the impression of raising and lowering the pitch of a note, just like the florid curlicues that Bach might have precisely notated. Her music often didn't obey strict tempo considerations, slowing down and then speeding up almost at random. Sometimes she'd use so much rubato that a song that started in waltz-time would end in 4/4.

This music was the product of an extraordinary backstory. Her father, the European-educated diplomat and mayor of Gondar, Kentiba Gebru Desta, was 78 years old when she was born, making her possibly the only person on the planet alive in 2023 with a parent born in 1845. The young Emahoy was a glamorous society girl, educated at a Swiss boarding school and fluent in several languages. She had piano and violin lessons at a classical conservatoire in Cairo (learning under the Polish violinist Alexander Kontorowicz), immersing herself in the music of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Schumann. On her return to Addis Ababa, she started to write her own compositions, and assisted Kontorowicz when he led the Emperor Haile Selassie's Imperial Guard Band (she recalls playing the Emperor some solo piano pieces and singing him a ballad in Italian).

In 1948, she was offered a place at the Royal Academy of Music in London but didn't take up the offer, instead surprising her peers by taking holy orders and living – barefoot – in a convent outside Addis Ababa. By the early 1960s she started playing the piano again, and her recordings between 1963 and the mid-70s have become the basis for her canon. In 1984, she relocated to an Ethiopian Orthodox convent in Jerusalem.

Only a few months ago, the US label Mississippi records unearthed another cache of recordings she made in the 1970s, soon to be released as a new album called Jerusalem. It shows another side to her character. On Quand La Mer Furieuse (When the Raging Sea) she sings in a quavering, guttural French over a simple vamping piano. On a threnody entitled Famine Disaster 1974, she sounds like a cockney pub pianist playing a heartbreakingly mournful, major-key hymn. There is also a lot of harmonic complexity: on the track called Jerusalem, she changes mode mid-song and modulates into several keys before resolution; on Home of Beethoven she knits together a series of arrhythmic chromatic riffs to create a pleasingly modernistic fugue.

Until recently she was, from all accounts, still practising every day on an upright piano in her convent, and writing new material. Maybe some of these songs will yet emerge, as singular as the rest.

Will an Oasis reunion finally happen – and do we really need it?

Ben Beaumont-Thomas, Shaad D'Souza and Alexis Petridis

Crashing into our collective consciousness once again, as inexorable as the tides and almost as frequent, is the suggestion of an Oasis reunion. Liam Gallagher has been unusually generous about his brother's new single Dead to the World, saying "how can such a mean spirited little man write such a beautiful song" – an improvement on comparing his music to that of arch-nemeses Blur – while Noel has said of a reunion: "He's got my number. He's got my manager's number. Call us … Stop talking on the fucking internet and let's see what you've got to say."

UN diplomats might have advised more dovish phrasing yet, but by the Gallaghers' standards they've each left a teddy holding some roses on the other's doorstep. Compare with 2020, when Noel said: "I've often thought, 'Let's just do a gig.' But I realised I would only be doing it to shut this fucking idiot up. The only other thing I could come up with was burning his house down or smashing his car in." Or with 2016, when Liam posted a picture of Noel with the caption "potato", and then wrote "Fuck Oasis" in block capitals.

By this point, whether Oasis will reform or not has become as central to the nation's pop-cultural psyche as who the next Bond will be; were they to reunite, it would not only make both men a staggering amount of money, but potentially make a terrific third act in Britain's greatest will-they-won't-they since Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy. As Matty Healy of the 1975 put it last month: "What are Oasis doing? Can you imagine being in potentially – right now, still – the coolest band in the world, and not doing it because you're in a mard with your brother?"

Like many brothers, they've always been at each other's throats, but in Oasis this was tempered with affection: the most powerful moment of their Knebworth documentary comes during the gig, when they look at each other delightedly, revelling in what they've made. Even committed fans of each brother's solo work since Oasis split in 2009 would admit that their partnership was in cosmic equilibrium: Liam's attitude is rootless without Noel's melodies, which in turn need Liam's catalytic spark.

▲ *'We live in an age where no band is allowed to leave the stage without an encore' … (L-R) Liam and Noel Gallagher. Photograph: Niels Van Iperen/Getty Images*

Not only could it make musical sense, but the bromance would be tied up with a bow. The enmity between Liam and Noel's then-wife Sara MacDonald seemed to deepen the brothers' division: "potato" jibes gave way to real nastiness, with Liam saying he didn't care if Noel and his children were abused online, and Sara responding: "Please god have dropped dead by the time my kids are on social media." Liam also said Noel was "rite up for [an Oasis reunion] but you know who won't let him as she doesn't like Oasis music". Noel and MacDonald announced they were divorcing earlier this year, and were this a Hollywood movie of brotherly rock stardom, scriptwriters would have him return to Liam to rediscover who he truly is and always had been. Cue another Knebworth gig and run credits. Or would this be too tidy an ending for a band whose fractiousness is part of the appeal? Two of our writers ponder the consequences.

'It's not perverse to suggest they're better apart'

We live in an age when no band is allowed to leave the stage without an encore: after 25 years of reformations, reunion tours and classic-albums-played-in-full shows, it's probably quicker to list the legendary bands that haven't got back together than those that have. Thus the scant handful of holdouts – of bands who could theoretically re-form, but for whatever reason haven't – have succeeded in bolstering their mystique by the simple expedient of doing nothing: in an age of rock and pop music obsessed with relatability, they seem more distant. Their careers are literally the stuff of legend.

So it is with Oasis. By the time they split up in 2009, they had been subject to diminishing artistic returns for more than 10 years, grimly punting out albums so mediocre it made you wonder if they'd ever been any good in the first place – or if the excitement they had engendered in the mid-90s had been a form of collective hysteria, a dry run for the madness that appeared to grip Britain in the wake of Princess Diana's death. The intervening decades have burnished their myth, the distance enabling you to see their career more clearly: it's easier to say that the first two Oasis albums, and the songs they relegated to B-sides in the same era, are largely fantastic, without the shadow of what the band would become – a byword for hoary, unadventurous musical toil – hanging over it. Uniquely among their Britpop peers, Oasis's best songs seem to have cut through to a generation too young to remember them first-hand: look on TikTok and there's umpteen videos soundtracked by Wonderwall and Stand By Me.

All of which you might take as reasons to re-form, but it's more than just wilful perversity to suggest it's somehow better if they remain unreconciled: Noel and Liam constantly sniping at each other feels more *Oasis-ish*, or at least more redolent of their golden era, than patching up their differences and acquiescing to public demand. The brothers' volatility, the thrilling sense that the band could – and indeed frequently did – fall apart in a burst of fraternal violence was intrinsic to their initial appeal. Their inability to smooth over their differences in public marked them out as different, and anyone who had grown up with a sibling could recognise themselves in the interminable, cyclical, needling row that erupted in front of an NME journalist in 1994 – "shurrup, you dick!" – and was later released as the Wibbling Rivalry single. The Oasis who doggedly trudged on, because that's what their fans wanted, or because they could coin it in on tour, or because they couldn't think of anything better to do – precisely the reasons bands re-form – were no fun at all. *Alexis Petridis*

▲ *'Noel and Liam constantly sniping at each other feels more Oasis-ish than patching up their differences' … Oasis in 2008. Photograph: Zak Hussein/PA*

'Seeing the Knebworth film made me rage with jealousy'

There's little I could say to argue for an Oasis reunion that wasn't covered last month when Matty Healy, being interviewed by Canadian TV station CBC, went on a minute-long tangent about why the Gallaghers should reconcile, in which he concluded that "there is not one person" who'd rather listen to their solo material than the best of Oasis. Personally, there were parts of Liam's 2022 album C'mon You Know I didn't hate – I think it's charming, at least, that he decided to work with leftfield producers like Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig and Caroline Polachek collaborator Danny L Harle – and found it spine-tinglingly great when I saw him perform Oasis hits during a solo set a few years ago. Fundamentally, though, Healy is completely right: any solo effort from either Gallagher is bound to be a pale imitation of their original band. I've only gotten into Oasis relatively recently – I was 12 when they broke up in 2009 – so the entirety of my engagement with the band has been listening to their albums, watching old concert videos and keeping track of Liam and Noel's endless feud.

I thought that hoping for an Oasis reunion was totally futile, so I haven't held my breath to ever see them in my lifetime. Seeing the 2021 concert documentary Oasis: Knebworth 1996, though, flicked a switch inside of me: watching the epic, stupidly grand show in a cinema with friends, buzzed after pre-gaming at a nearby Irish pub and sneaking in bags full of beers, I felt a deep, rageful jealousy build inside of me over the fact that I could only ever experience something like Knebworth in a cinema environment.

Part of it was the concert itself, sure, but just as much of it was the infectious vibe of Oasis's wild, insouciant fanbase – despite all the lewdness and public drunkenness, there's something totally pure about hearing 250,000 people joyfully scream along to Cigarettes & Alcohol or Some Might Say. I'm clearly not the only one totally won over by the wash of manic, euphoric vibes: Knebworth 1996 was the highest-grossing British documentary of 2021, and a live album of the show peaked at No 4 on the album charts. As a wise man once said: "Do me a favour – get back together, stop messing around." *Shaad D'Souza*

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'What's wrong between men and women': the thriller igniting debate about femicide

Phil Hoad

At 6am on a Tuesday in May 2013, the half-charred, petrol-doused body of a young woman was found on a residential street in Lagny-sur-Marne, 25km east of Paris. It was 21-year-old Maud Maréchal, who had been returning at night from a friend's house to her family home, just a few metres from where she was killed. A neighbour discovered the corpse, the police fruitlessly investigated this horrific murder, and then Maréchal's death was filed away, hardly noticed by the French press.

Until now. A fictionalised account of the murder, The Night of the 12th by Franco-German director Dominik Moll, has just swept the boards at France's Oscars equivalent, the César awards, reviving interest in the Maréchal case. But only, thinks Moll, because he made a point of mentioning her during his speech for best film: "It was important to remind people there was a real victim, and her name was Maud," says the director, speaking over Zoom from his home in Montreuil, 20km from where the young woman lived. "But then quite a few journalists started to talk about the real case, and some of them not in a very responsible way."

Moll had read Pauline Guéna's book 18.3: Une Année à la PJ, a David Simon-like immersion into the work of Versailles's judicial police. Rather than the particulars of the Maréchal murder, he was intrigued by the idea of investigators becoming obsessed by the case that gets away. But adapting the 30pages devoted to the case, the 60-year-old quickly found himself framing it within the context of the raging public debate in France about femicide: "My co-writer Gilles Marchand and I felt that we needed to develop this aspect of what's wrong between men and women, as the investigator in the film puts it. The #MeToo movement made us more aware of these problems, and we probably wouldn't have made the same film five or 10 years ago."

▲ 'It was important to remind people there was a real victim' … The Night of the 12th. Photograph: Haut et Court

Moll's previous film, the 2019 highlands thriller Only the Animals, also featured a young woman's murder, but put it at the heart of a globalised reflection on desire. The sombre, almost shell-shocked The Night of the 12th is more rigorous in its interrogation of gender relations. But compared to modern cold-case classics such as Zodiac or Memories of Murder, it feels uninterested in prodding us with thriller mechanics. Instead, it emphasises the devastation experienced by the victim's family, before turning the lamp firmly on the investigators: the stolid new boy Yohan, played by Bastien Bouillon, and his silverback partner Marceau (Bouli Lanners), for whom the dead woman's sex life touches a nerve, given his failed marriage.

Moll spent a week with the judicial police in the Alpine city of Grenoble, where he relocated the story, and realised that almost all of them were men. Which led to a certain atmosphere: "When there's a group, there's always this thing where you can't show weakness. And so you can make jokes about things, to let off steam. But really it's saying: 'All this violence, all these crimes get to me, and I feel depressed.' I think it's more difficult for men than women to talk about intimate things." You can see how such routine flippancy could harden into the kind of institutional misogyny that has recently been found in London's Metropolitan Police.

If these are coping mechanisms at the business end of the patriarchy, Moll began to notice manifestations in his own life – helped by discussions with his two adult daughters. "Even if we don't always agree, they contributed to me starting to ask myself questions. Just small things, like the way men tend to cut off women when they speak. I realised that I do that too. The 'mansplaining'," he says, with an apologetic toothy grin. "All these small things put together create a general atmosphere where men are in the control positions."

Another such position is, of course, that of film director – exercising representational control over the portrayal of women. Moll has often spoken about Hitchcock as his lodestar, an inspiration clearly visible in his previous César winner, the 2000 sly black comedy Harry, He's Here to Help, and the 2005 thriller Lemming.

When I mention the master's women-in-jeopardy fetish and misogynistic tension with many of his female leads, Moll leaps to his defence. He says Hitch's precision regarding point of view inspired him when depicting Clara's death and carbonised remains in The Night of the 12th – which he told his producers was necessary in order to lend the crime the appropriate gravity. "I have a problem with a lot of Tarantino's violent scenes, because I feel he's just having fun. Hitchcock helped me because he is very good at conveying violence without showing it. So we had those tight closeups when she meets the killer, on the lighter, on her eyes, then suddenly to have the very wide shot – unspectacular in a sense – of her crossing the frame as a small burning figure. All those things come from studying Hitchcock and his film language."

Moll doesn't think his work is getting necessarily darker as he gets older,

▲ 'I guess I like to observe human beings as if they were animals' … Dominik Moll. Photograph: Marechal Aurore/ABACA/REX/Shutterstock

even though The Night of the 12th is shorn of the piquant ironies of Harry, He's Here to Help. But with his early-noughties and present-day work equally drawn down into unconscious nooks of the psyche, his interest in human foibles is constant. During the lockdown, he took up an old childhood love again, a remnant of his pre-cinema interest in art and biology: drawing. "Very detailed drawings of animals in black ink," he specifies. "And I guess I also like to observe human beings as if they were animals. As if I were a kind of biologist, studying the behaviour." In this tech-ubiquitous era, it's good to hear someone still has the patience for *la bête humaine*.

● The Night of the 12th is released in cinemas on 31 March

The police make jokes, to let off steam. But really they're saying: 'All these crimes get to me, and I feel depressed'

Feelgood factor: Mae Martin's Sap on Netflix is comedic open-heart surgery

Brian Logan

It's always interesting to see a standup's first show since becoming a superstar. The wait's been longer than I'd have liked with Mae Martin's Sap – because press were excluded from its live performances (one of the perks, it would appear, that fame brings), but now it's on Netflix, this first solo set since the huge success of Martin's queer romcom Feel Good on the same platform. Filmed in their native Canada, on a woodland stage set, it's a hugely likable hour by a comic who's made a specialty of emotional self-inquiry, whose standup is like open-heart surgery with a microphone in the scalpel's place.

While it incorporates elements from Martin's previous shows, Sap also feels like a step forward. Unlike 2017's Dope, say, which zeroed in on Martin's teenage years and addictive personality, there's no particular theme here: the show radiates (and justifies) confidence in the 35-year-old's ability to hold our attention without one. The self-reflexive tics that once characterised Martin's standup have fallen away, replaced by composure and authority – albeit composure put to the task of depicting a turbulent inner life ("I'm full to the absolute brim with feelings"), and authority in the service of lovably self-mocking humour.

▲ 'I'm full to the absolute brim with feelings' … Mae Martin. Photograph: Netflix

Content-wise, it feels like a debut, a re-issued autobiographical calling card. And maybe that's strategic, as this special offers many Feel Good fans their first chance to encounter Mae-at-a-mic. Not for the first time in their work, the show dwells on the quirks of Martin's family background, with a big-hitting opener about (as their dad tells it) how they were conceived. Then there's a section on puberty, which transformed a confident kid into a gender-confused, internet-addled delinquent. As well as being entertaining moment to moment, this material is machine-tooled to win Martin a place in our hearts, as they position themselves at an angle to their parents' eccentricity but also express dorky solidarity with a postman who likes to bury his mail.

That story makes Martin feel seen; elsewhere they invite us into their feelings of rage, or mortification. Martin's therapist, we are told, trains them to keep their emotions at a critical distance – a proposal marvelled at here. But that is, in fact, part of Martin's comic craft, how they *feel* for our entertainment, while anatomising those feelings with a beady intelligence. There's nothing at all remarkable, incident-

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wise, about the story of a chance encounter with one of Martin's "big exes". It's compelling because we're on the emotional rollercoaster too, because the comic has invited us to invest in the ebbs and poundings of their heart.

Martin is also pleasingly un-hack, bringing perspectives to the stage that (give or take a few routines recycled from earlier shows) you've not heard before. I love the bit about the conversation with a recent boyfriend about baby names: what a fresh angle on becoming middle-aged, and articulated so vividly. ("Let me just wade through this graveyard of dead hypothetical children …") A later bit, born of lockdown experience, craves our indulgence, as Martin identifies something obliquely embarrassing about adults having their own rooms. From these tenuous beginnings, the riff develops into one of the show's richest sections, as our host distils all human interaction into a childish exchange of one snow globe for another.

In a show bookended by scenes around a campfire (featuring guest star Phil "Dr Brown" Burgers), there's arguably a slight drop-off latterly, as Martin addresses gender and the (so-called) trans debate. Nothing wrong with their take on this, which is as humane and heartfelt as you'd expect, if not, as they acknowledge, remotely surprising. Likewise the closing "Buddhist parable", which is more designed for uplift than laughter. But Sap remains a charming hour of standup, as Martin shakes the snow globe of their emotional life and lets their feelings dance in the light.

Mae Martin: Sap is on Netflix

Post your questions for singing legend Darlene Love

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

Hers is one of the most powerful voices in popular music: so warming in its deep register and so head-spinningly euphoric in its higher notes. At the age of 81, Darlene Love is still socking it to audiences – and she joins us this week to answer your questions.

Grounded first in gospel choirs then doo-wop groups, her group the Blossoms caught the ear of producer Phil Spector in the early 1960s. He drafted Love in to sing the lead on the infectiously strutting He's a Rebel, which was credited to another group, the Crystals, on its release. Love perfectly evoked the infatuation and insubordination in this tale of loving a no-good guy, and took it to the top of the US charts.

She became one of the great – and poorly treated – muses of Spector, recording further US hits such as He's the Boy I Love, also credited to the Crystals, and a version of Disney song Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah with the trio Bob B Soxx & the Blue Jeans, before eventually being allowed by Spector to record under her own name. In 1963 she had her best-known and most enduring hit: Christmas (Baby Please Come Home), a maximalist blast of twinkling delight, which, for many, is the defining song of the season.

▲ *One of the most powerful voices in music … Darlene Love at the 2021 Tony awards. Photograph: Arturo Holmes/Getty Images*

She carried on working with the Blossoms, too, and while their own singles struggled, as backing singers they came into the orbit of the biggest stars of the era: Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Tom Jones, Cher, the Beach Boys, Sam Cooke, Dionne Warwick and many more. That's Love singing on That's Life by Frank Sinatra, the Ronettes' Be My Baby, and even doing those chatty interjections on Monster Mash. Her skill as a backing singer was eventually chronicled in the 2013 Oscar-winning documentary 20 Feet from Stardom.

Her career dwindled in the 70s, and by the 80s she was working as a hotel maid, but she returned to continue singing and started an acting career, appearing as herself in Broadway musical Leader of the Pack, and then the four Lethal Weapon movies, playing Trish, the wife of Danny Glover's Roger Murtaugh. Later Broadway appearances came in productions of Grease, Hairspray and a musical version of Stephen King's Carrie produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, and further accolades included being added to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and being named one of the 100 greatest singers by Rolling Stone magazine.

It's an astonishing creative life, woven through the very best of 20th-century pop culture, and as she releases a new live album, Live 1982 – including a killer version of Bruce Springsteen's Hungry Heart – Darlene Love will answer your questions about it all. Post them in the comments below before 4pm UK time on Thursday 30 March; her answers will be published on Friday 7 March in our Film & Music section, and online.

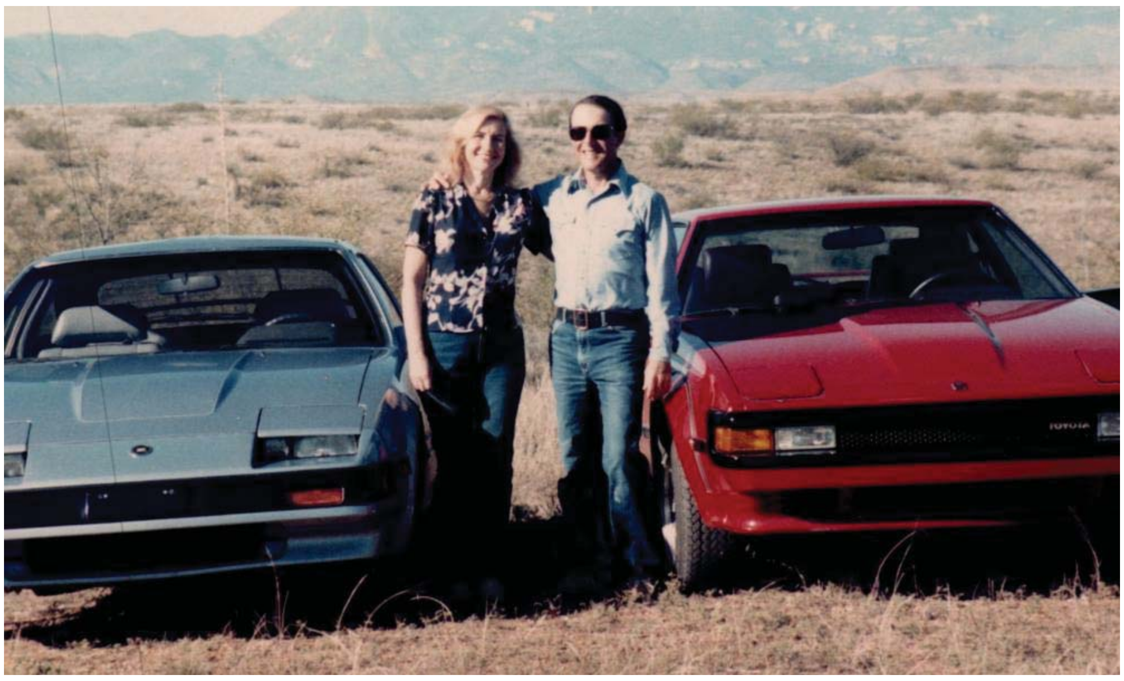
▲ *Darlene Love in the early 1960s. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Redferns*

The Thief Collector review – the ordinary married couple behind a massive art heist

Cath Clarke

It was a brazen case of daylight robbery. In 1985, a couple walked into an art gallery on the campus of the University of Arizona and left 15 minutes later with a rolled-up Willem de Kooning shoved up the man's jacket. In 2017, the painting was finally recovered – not by the FBI, but by a trio of house clearance guys in New Mexico. It had been hanging for 30 years on the bedroom wall of retired teachers Rita and Jerry Alter.

How an ordinary couple like the Alters pulled off one of the biggest art heists of the 20th century is told in this mostly entertaining documentary. You can imagine the story being turned into a podcast and it's perhaps stretched a little thin for a full-length documentary. (Did we really need an interview with the couple's nephew's son?) The weak link is the film's dramatisation of the theft: a tongue-in-cheek pastiche that feels a bit glib as questions about the Alters' motivations deepen and darken. Still, the film offers a fascinating glimpse into the mystery of other people, especially other people's marriages. Friends and family still look dazed that the Alters – Rita and Jerry! – were behind the theft.



▲ *Motivations that deepen and darken … Rita and Jerry Alter. Photograph: Signature*

The unlikely heroes of the story are a trio of honest-as-they-come house clearance men who bought the De Kooning along with the contents of Jerry and Rita's house after they died. When a customer offered them $200,000 for the painting, they did a bit of Googling; after realising it could be the missing artwork (Woman-Ochre, now worth around $160m), they were straight on the phone to the gallery in Arizona to return it, with no question of making a dime for themselves.

The three men are brilliant interviewees, warm and thoroughly decent; their experience in rooting through other people's homes and lives has clearly given them the kind of insight that would make them great detectives, too. And if nothing else, this documentary ought to give someone working in television the idea of making a detective series about house clearance experts.

● The Thief Collector is released on 31 March on Amazon Prime Video.

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Billionaire chic: the meaning of Gwyneth Paltrow's court wardrobe

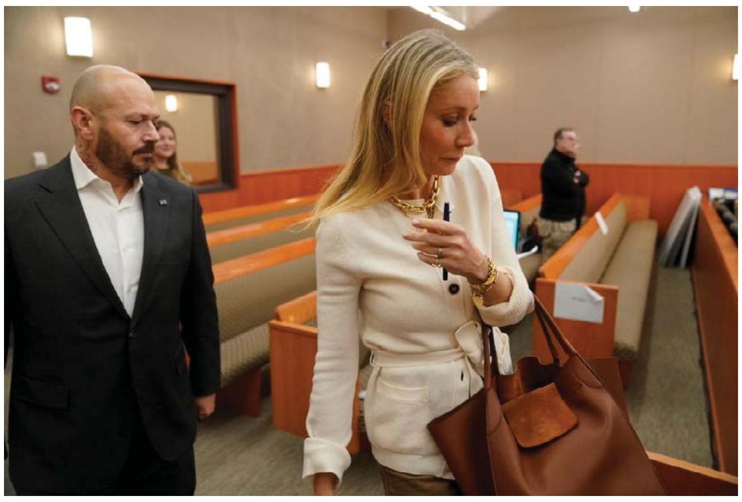
Chloe Mac Donnell

On Tuesday, Gwyneth Paltrow, the Oscar-winning actor turned wellness advocate, appeared in a Utah court over a collision at a ski resort in 2016. Photographs of Paltrow sitting next to her defence lawyers, wearing a simple cream knitted jumper, her honey-coloured hair loose, makeup pared back, quickly went viral.

Paltrow's high-necked jumper appears to be from the Italian luxury brand Loro Piana. Nicknamed "Uniqlo for billionaires" by fashion insiders, it specialises in cashmere, with Paltrow's Parksville turtleneck priced at £1,220 online.

For the second day of her trial, Paltrow was pictured in another cream knit, this time from her own brand, G Label by Goop, which sells for a tad under £500. Then she appeared in a moss green wool coat from the US brand The Row (£3,900), black lug-soled boots from Prada (£1,150) and G Label by Goop gold chain jewellery.

Paltrow's court wardrobe reflects a wider trend for stealth wealth – clothes that murmur rather than loudly declare their value. Free from garish logos, colourways and patterns, these pieces are redolent of a new low-key luxury.



▲ *Paltrow dons a belted Bennett cardigan from her G label by Goop in the courtroom in Park City, Utah, on 22 March. Photograph: Rick Bowmer/AP*

"These brands are easily recognised by members of their tribe," says Milton Pedraza, chief executive of the Luxury Institute, a research group in New York. "The wearer makes a statement without having to try to make a statement. Everyone who should know, knows."

Loro Piana has become somewhat of a market leader for this quiet luxury aesthetic. It's worn by real life billionaires (Rishi Sunak, a near billionaire, is said to be a fan) and scions of on-screen billionaires. In this week's opening episode of season four of the HBO drama Succession, Kendall Roy (Jeremy Strong) wore a custom-made suede jacket from the Italian heritage brand. Kendall's ascetic boardroom style is the antithesis of his social-climbing brother-in-law Tom (Matthew Macfadyen), known for his chinos and puffy Moncler vest. Michelle Matland, the show's costume designer, previously described Tom's style as "being like a peacock. He goes to the obvious stores and his motto is: 'If it's expensive, it's good'," says Matland. "And if you can see that price tag, even better … Kendall was bred to know the difference and Tom is just walking into it."

By contrast, Paltrow's court wardrobe has an old money feel. Its soft power dressing is more reminiscent of Succession's Shiv Roy (Sarah Snook). In choosing to not wear something more formal – remember Rebekah Vardy's rotation of power suits and designer handbags for her libel case last year? – Paltrow implies she is so wealthy she doesn't need to overstress about the lawsuit, and she doesn't care who knows it.

The non-threatening aesthetic also jars with the allegation – which Paltrow denies – that she injured another skier and then blithely skied away. Even the more tailored pieces she has chosen have a benign appeal. Her grey blazer and matching trousers were oversized and slouchy, softened further by pairing with a thin ribbed knitted top instead of a standard shirt, while a longer-length black skirt was paired with a cashmere-collared button-down.

And we've seen the informal look before. It's Paltrow's go-to when she takes to Instagram to promote her favourite depuffing eye mask or sex-boosting supplement. It's the type of thing you can imagine she would wear to the farmer's market to pick up ingredients for a midweek (macrobiotic) family supper. Familiar, gentle and approachable, it says: "Yes, I'm a multimillionaire A-lister who skis at an expensive resort", but also: "I'm a mom who enjoys bashing the slopes with my kids at the weekend." Knitwear and lug-soled footwear are relatable, especially to a Colorado-based jury.

▲ *Paltrow leaves the courtroom on 21 March wearing a moss-green wool coat from US brand The Row. Photograph: Mega/GC Images*

Riotsville, USA review – disquieting study of police tactics to deal with social unrest

Peter Bradshaw

As if in a seance or hypnotic trance, Sierra Pettengill conjures the ambient voices of the riot-torn United States in the 1960s, traumatised by the uproar in Watts, Chicago, Newark and Detroit. She curates archive TV discussion show clips and newsreel footage of the times, including some quite extraordinary contemporary reports about the "Riotsville" imitation towns that the US army built to practise anti-riot techniques. These were complete with audience bleachers in which an invited crowd of military brass could approvingly watch a full-scale re-enactment of the Watts riot – a bizarre theatrical fantasy in which the disorder was swiftly and efficiently brought under control. (Jesse Moss and Tony Gerber's 2008 film Full Battle Rattle discussed the fake Iraqi town built in the Mojave Desert for very similar reasons.)

Pettengill also shows us TV reports on Lyndon B Johnson's Kerner commission which was tasked with looking into the causes of the riots, but whose findings resulted chiefly in increased federal funding for the police. The authorities were obsessed with the largely illusory threats of "snipers", whose supposed presence justified police and army intrusions and attacks on private property. She shows us earnest but intensely angry discussion shows aired by PBL, the Public Broadcast Laboratory (a precursor to PBS) which ventilated the rage felt by African Americans over civil rights, and was shut down when its sponsor, the Ford Foundation, withdrew funding.

▲ *Illusory threat … Riotsville, USA. Photograph: Magnolia Pictures*

There is something eerie and uncanny in these broadcasts, particularly from the Republican convention in Miami Beach in 1968, in which the presenters will cursorily report on deaths and disorder outside the convention hall, but then listlessly return to the dull official proceedings and then, when that is simply too torpid, air another ad from the station sponsor. This film is obviously comparable to the work of Adam Curtis and there's also a weird but very relevant resemblance to Peter Watkins's films, particularly the dystopian satire Punishment Park from 1971. A shiver of disquiet runs right through it.

● Riotsville, USA is released on 31 March in UK and Irish cinemas and on digital platforms.

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Law of Tehran review – ferocious Michael Mann-style thriller of the Iranian underworld

Peter Bradshaw

▲ *Fanatical energy … Law of Tehran. Photograph: Vertigo Releasing*

If Michael Mann made a movie in Iran it might look like this: a ferocious drama-thriller in which a haunted, morally ambiguous cop faces off with a despairing drug lord. We begin with a barnstorming chase sequence in which an officer runs after a drug dealer holding a bag of heroin; the scene climaxes with a shockingly nasty end for the dealer, setting a gruesome tone for the rest of the film.

The director is Saeed Roustayi, whose Leila's Brothers was in competition at Cannes last year; this is in fact his previous film. Payman Maadi (from Asghar Farhadi's A Separation) is police officer Samad, who is losing the "war on drugs"; gangsters have murdered the son of his subordinate, so his team's dedication to bringing down the drug dealers has a new fanatical energy. Navid Mohammadzadeh is Naser, a drug kingpin who is already feeling his dominion crumbling.

Starting with a small-time bust, and bending the law with menaces and threats applied to the foot soldiers from whom he demands the names of those higher up, Samad and his crew ascend the food chain of evil to discover Naser in his penthouse, reclining in his hot tub in grisly circumstances. Once taken in, desperate Naser offers Samad frantically huge bribes; the officer's response is strange. Is he tempted? Or does he simply, in his simmering contempt, want to make Naser cringe, to hold out the hope of release only to take it away?

The station house is an amoral inferno in which prisoners are crowded in a hellhole holding tank, like something by Héctor Babenco; cops can themselves be impugned and briefly handcuffed on the basis of culprits' cynical claims of corruption and complicity, while a climactic execution scene is truly stomach-turning – a ritual slaughter which gives catharsis to no one. It is a grim and grisly world in which the "law of Tehran" feels like a futile rearguard action against chaos.

● Law of Tehran is released on 31 March in cinemas and on digital platforms.

'A swipe at fashion capitalism': Telfar's experiment lets customers set prices

Alaina Demopoulos

▲ *A model walks the runway at a Telfar fashion show in 2020. Photograph: Vittorio Zunino Celotto/Getty Images*

Demi Elder owns 16 Telfar bags. The 31-year-old from Crown Heights, Brooklyn, tries to catch every drop she can from the brand, which has been namechecked in Beyoncé lyrics and seen on everyone from Lil Nas X to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

"I love that it's Black-owned, unisex, thoroughly inclusive, and meant for all genders," she says.

The brand's rectangular shopping bags are particularly popular, made in 38 hues and three sizes that range in price from $150 to $257; new colors sell out in seconds.

On Monday, shortly after noon, Elder added to her collection. Instead of bags, she hit the website for its latest clothing drop, and found simple black T-shirts emblazoned with the brand's logo for $50, cropped crew-necks for $65, and "gown-length basketball tops" at $150 each. The majority of items had sold out within the hour.

Elder left Telfar.net feeling content, bagging a pair of heather gray sweatpants for the wholesale price of $80. That was about $240 less than the full price of the pants, because Elder was shopping Telfar's "live pricing" experiment.

The brand let customers determine the cost of 29 new pieces of sportswear by listing them at wholesale prices at noon on Monday. (Wholesale can cost over 50% less than what shoppers would normally pay on the brand's website.) As customers shopped, the wholesale price went up in small increments until the stock sold out. The more people who added a piece to their cart, the more likely shoppers would get it at a discount. For instance: the sweatpants Elder purchased would have cost $320 full price. The price set by customer demand would become the "forever price" for all restocks of that item going forward.

By early Monday afternoon, most of the stock had sold out. Anyone who missed the opportunity can come back next week: new items will drop every week through 24 April.

As Babak Radboy, creative director of Telfar, told Fast Company, the brand's stunt reveals just how arbitrary some of the costs in fashion can be. Radboy and Telfar Clemens, the brand founder, came up with the idea while they were designing a hoodie and "realized the brand could charge $100 or $600 for it".

"If we charge $600 for the hoodie, then only one class of person would buy it – the person who can afford it," Radboy told the publication. So they came up with a pricing model to help keep items affordable and accessible to the widest swath of customers. "Many brands use price as a barrier to entry," Clemens said. "I never wanted that for my brand." In a way, the new pricing model exposes just how much the traditional fashion system marks up clothing.

This, obviously, goes against decades of fashion world logic that in-demand things need to cost lots of money. "Most brands use the popularity of a product to increase prices and test the limit of client loyalty," said Louis Pisano, a fashion reporter for Nylon France. "But those brands are not Telfar. When Telfar lowers the prices of popular items, it doesn't have the same negative effect and drop in brand perception as it would for other buzzy names."

Rachel Tashjian, the fashion news director at Harper's Bazaar, said that Radboy once told her that he and Clemens set out to make "an avant-garde Fashion Nova". Most couture houses would not dare to compare themselves to a fast fashion empire, and that's part of Telfar's appeal.

"Dynamic pricing is just cool, and a rare genuine swipe at capitalism in fashion, to create a system in which the bestselling items in a collection are the most affordable," Tashjian said.

Andrea Bossi, a writer at Fashionista, believes the drop is another way for the brand to hype up its fanbase, which sees itself less as customers and more as a community. "I wonder if this model is an ode or a love letter to their fans. Even though the brand is about accessibility, you can't always drop $200 for a bag."

Balancing couture and being community-oriented can be difficult. When Telfar's buzzy faux leather Circle bag was released last year, online critics spoke out against its $567 price tag, saying the accessory went against the brand's original ethos. But others defended Telfar, including the editor Shelton Boyd-Griffith, who wrote: "The conversation around Telfar's Circle bag price point is loaded because it poses the dangerous misconception that Black luxury brands can't grow and scale."

The debacle did not curb interest in the brand. Radboy told the Guardian that Telfar "will probably try live pricing with our duffels and circle bags" at some point in the future. Why start this experiment with clothes? Radboy said that the bags were already ubiquitous, especially in creative circles.

▲ *Demi Elder at home with her collection of Telfar pieces. Photograph: Demi Elder*

"We want the clothes to have the chance to do the same," he said. "If you walk five blocks in any direction in New York, you will see a Telfar bag. We want to see the full look out here."

There are also logistical reasons it makes sense for Telfar to let customers set their own prices. The model will help the brand collect data about what pieces customers want the most. "This will give us information about how much of each product we should order in the future," Radboy told Fast Company. "And the larger the order, the cheaper it costs to manufacture."

Since starting his eponymous line in 2005, Clemens has always dismissed the idea that high fashion was synonymous with expensive products. Clemens, born in Queens to Liberian immigrant parents, embraces working-class references in his design. He's created uniforms for White Castle employees and held fashion week events at Rainbow Shops, an inexpensive retail chain. Fans often point to the brand's motto as its guiding light, when it comes to inclusion: "It's not for you, it's for everyone."

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Insect infamy: rare beetle named for former California governor

Associated Press

Scientists are naming a rare species of beetle in honor of the former California governor Jerry Brown after finding one at his ranch.

Bembidion brownorum was last seen in 1966, but it hadn't been named or described until one was collected near a creek on Brown's ranch in Colusa county, about an hour's drive northwest of Sacramento, the University of California, Berkeley announced on Monday.

The beetle is brown and tiny at about 5mm (0.20in) long, although that is still larger than other Bembidion beetles. Under magnification "it glows with a green and gold metallic shimmer", according to UC Berkeley.

Brown, who left office in 2019, lives in California's inner coastal mountain range on land that has been in his family since the 1860s. He has offered his property as a meeting space for the California Native Plant Society, entomologist, and forestry and fire experts.

▲ *A specimen of Bembidion brownorum discovered by a UC Berkeley entomologist. Photograph: David Maddison/AP*

UC Berkeley entomologist Kipling Will has been sampling insects at the 2,500-acre (1,012-hectare) ranch for more than two years. On 1 July 2021, he found an unfamiliar beetle and called up an expert, David Maddison at Oregon State University, to help identify it, UC Berkeley said.

They determined that it was a species that hadn't been previously named or described. Will later found 21 specimens in museums throughout California, although they may have been unlabeled or misidentified, UC Berkeley said.

The species probably was rarely spotted because it probably has been rapidly declining as its habitat is destroyed by urbanization and agricultural development, Will said.

The beetle was named in honor of Brown and his wife, Anne Brown.

"I'm very glad that [my ranch] is advancing science in some interesting and important ways," Brown said in the UC Berkeley statement.

"There are so many undiscovered species," he said. "I think it's very important that we catalog and discover what we have and understand their impact on the environment – how it's functioning and how it's changing."

Will and Maddison described the beetle in a study published Monday in the journal ZooKeys. John S Sproul of the University of Nebraska Omaha is a co-author.

▲ *Jerry Brown on his Colusa county ranch near Williams, California. 'I'm very glad that [my ranch] is advancing science,' said Brown of the discovery. Photograph: Rich Pedroncelli/AP*

"As of the moment of publication this morning the species was formally named," Will said through UC Berkeley in answer to a question by the Associated Press. "If the question is about a ceremony of some sort, no we don't do that."

Cosmic explosion last year may be 'brightest ever seen'

Tom Ambrose and agency

A cosmic explosion that blinded space instruments last year may be the brightest ever seen, according to astronomers.

The blast took place 2bn light years from Earth, producing a pulse of intense radiation that swept through the solar system in October last year.

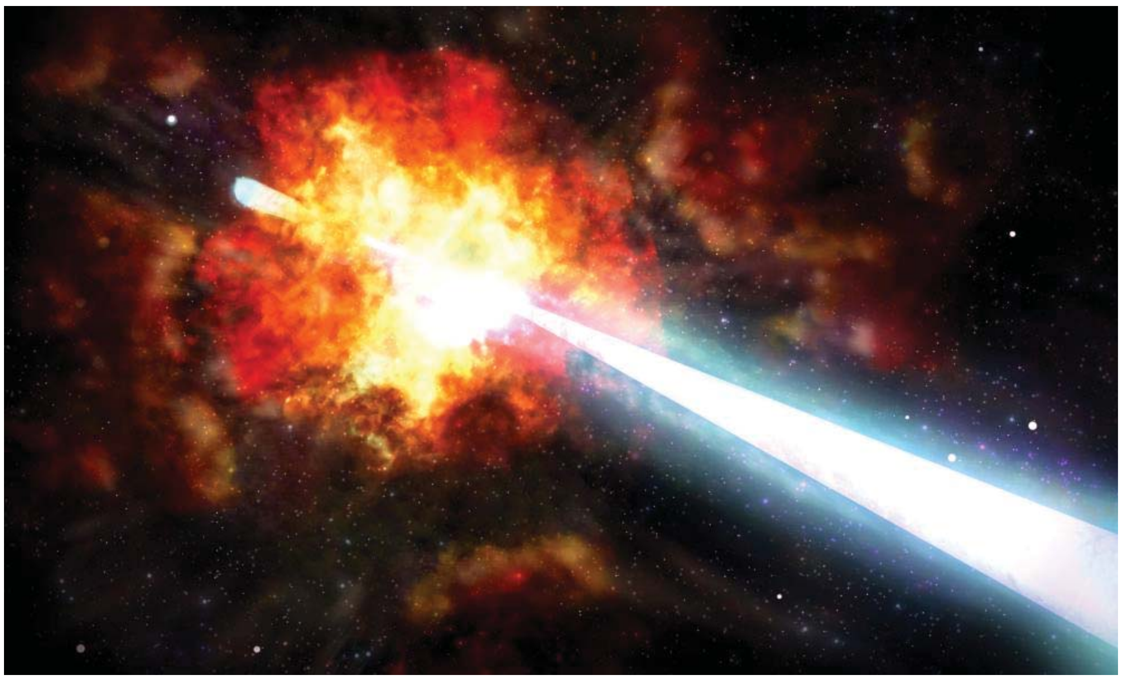
The cosmic event, known as a gamma-ray burst (GRB), produced some of the strongest and brightest explosions in the universe, triggering detectors on multiple spacecraft.

The October blast was deemed so exceptional that astronomers said it was the brightest of all time since the beginning of human civilisation.

Dr Dan Perley, of the Astrophysics Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University, who followed the event with the university's Liverpool telescope on the Spanish island of La Palma, said: "There is nothing in human experience that comes anywhere remotely close to such an outpouring of energy. Nothing."

Though they last mere seconds, GRBs produce as much energy as the sun will emit during its entire lifetime.

Perley said the event, dubbed GRB 221009A, produced "a phenomenal amount of energy", adding: "It's certainly the highest value ever recorded for a gamma-ray burst."



▲ *Artist's impression of a beam of intense radiation produced by a cosmic explosion thought to be the brightest of all time. Photograph: Soheb Mandhai/PA*

The explosion blinded most gamma-ray instruments in space, meaning astronomers could not measure the real intensity of the emission, the like of which occurs once every 10,000 years.

Scientists had to reconstruct its energy expenditure from past and present data, with the analysis of 7,000 GRBs suggesting that GRB 221009A is 70 times brighter than any yet seen.

According to the European Space Agency, the blast deposited about a gigawatt of power into the Earth's upper atmosphere – the equivalent of a power station's energy output.

Astronomers believe GRB 221009A is a result of a massive star collapsing in on itself to form a black hole.

Perley added: "The star would have been many times more massive than the sun, probably 20 times as massive or more."

GRBs also produce a supernova but astronomers are yet to ascertain whether that occurred in this case.

It is thought that GRB 221009A was so bright because it was much closer to Earth compared with other known GRBs and the beam of electromagnetic radiation happened to be pointing in the direction of the planet.

Andrew Levan, a professor of astrophysics at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, said: "We cannot say conclusively that there is a supernova, which is surprising given the burst's brightness.

"If it's there, it's very faint. We plan to keep looking, but it's possible the entire star collapsed straight into the black hole instead of exploding."

GRBs are usually followed by a shock wave that emits lower energy radiation, known as an afterglow, that gradually fades over time.

The findings were reported in two separate papers in the Astrophysical Journal and Astrophysical Journal Letters.

Five planets line up to put on celestial show for skywatchers tonight

Maanvi Singh and agencies

Five planets will align in the night sky for an extraordinary view on Tuesday in a phenomenon dubbed a "planetary parade".

The planets – Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Uranus and Mars – will come together on the western horizon, near the crescent moon, for a brief display after sunset. People almost anywhere on Earth with a westerly view and clear skies will be able to catch it.

Although the best day to see the full array is Tuesday, several of the planets will remain visible for the next two weeks. Jupiter, Venus and Mars will

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be the easiest to spot, as they shine brightly, according to Cooke. Mars will appear close to the moon, with a reddish glow, while Mercury and Uranus will appear dimmer and best viewed through binoculars.

If you're a "planet collector", Cooke said, it's a rare chance to spot Uranus – which will appear as a green glow above Venus.

But the view will be ephemeral; Mercury and Jupiter will quickly dip below the horizon around half an hour after sunset.

The planets aren't actually close together – they are scattered across the solar system. It will just appear that way from our perspective on Earth. The phenomenon occurs when the planets are orbiting on the same side of the sun as Earth.

It is not uncommon for groups of planets to come together this way in earthly skies. Another five-planet array, with a slightly different lineup, will happen in June.

Still, it's a worthy view. "You get to see pretty much the whole solar system in one night," says Rory Bentley, a UCLA astronomer, told Popular Science.

The celestial event was also endorsed by the former Apollo astronaut Buzz Aldrin, who urged people to gaze skyward on Tuesday evening.

Scientists gain insights into Old Master artists' use of egg in oil paintings

Nicola Davis

It pays to go to work on an egg when painting with oils, researchers have found, as the addition of yolk can prevent wrinkling, yellowing and problems with humidity.

The use of egg as a binding medium for pigments, a form of paint known as egg tempera, has a long history, turning up in works including the mural paintings of the Palace of Nestor in Pylos, dating to 1200BC.

But in the 15th century there was a shift in European paintings towards using oil as a binder instead – an approach favoured by early Netherlandish painters such as Jan van Eyck.

Despite the shift, egg has been found in the works of Old Master artists such as Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci – with the former's Lamentation over the Dead Christ among those featuring the use of egg within oil paint.

▲ *Detail from Sandro Botticelli's Lamentation over the Dead Christ, one of the works found to feature the use of egg within oil paint. Photograph: Prisma Archivo/Alamy*

Now scientists say they have new insights into why such artists might have added the ingredient to their oil paints. "[The] egg is used for modification and fine-tuning of paint properties," said Dr Patrick Dietemann of the Doerner Institut in Germany.

Writing in the journal Nature Communications, Doerner and colleagues report how they explored the issue by creating three types of paint.

The first was made from pigment ground with linseed oil, the second used the same mixture but with the addition of a few drops of egg yolk, and the third was made by mixing a pigment with a solution of diluted egg yolk – after drying this was ground and dispersed with oil.

The results reveal how yolk can influence the stiffness of the paint, depending upon how it is added and the pigment used.

"By changing preparation technique you can change the properties of the paint. Thus two paints with the same composition can have different microstructures and this will result in different properties," said Dr Ilaria Bonaduce, an author of the study from the University of Pisa.

The team found very stiff oil paints could be made by adding a few drops of egg yolk, allowing the paint to be applied in thick layers that do not spread – known as impasto. "In addition, the stiffness of the lower layers of paint prevents the paint surface from cracking [or] wrinkling during drying," said Prof Norbert Willenbacher, an author of the study from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology.

The team also discovered humidity had less of an influence on the properties of lead white paint when the paint was made by drying the pigment with egg yolk before grinding and adding oil. "[The yolk] protects the paints from undesirable changes caused by absorption of moisture from the environment, because the water is captured in the protein layer [surrounding the pigments]," Willenbacher said.

The study also reveals egg yolk generally increased the drying time of paints, a feature the researchers attributed to its antioxidant properties, which also help to protect the paints from degrading over time.

While the team said it was not possible to exclude unintentional additions of egg to the oil paints, Bonaduce said it was likely the Old Master artists were well aware of the benefits of the ingredient. "I am quite convinced that they did not know the chemical and physical explanations of what they were doing, but they knew very well what they were doing."

We must continue to guard against the anti-vaccine movement

I wholeheartedly agree with Devi Sridhar's concern about dwindling childhood protection from infectious diseases (In a sceptical era, understand this: vaccines do work - and our children need them, 27 March). Coming from a small hamlet near Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, I developed measles, mumps, then whooping cough in rapid succession on starting primary school. I spent most of my first four months off school. I was fortunate to join a long queue and receive my first polio vaccine.

In 1966, when I was a medical student, my father was appointed to manage the only British Polio Fellowship residential home in the country. I was horrified to find young people there with severe paralysis from the waist down, wholly dependent on carers. There were older residents too, many with grossly swollen ankles. They shared ghastly stories of life in an iron lung during their initial recovery and the anger of their plight now.

▲ *'Across the UK, one in eight children are not fully vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella.' Photograph: David Cheskin/PA*

In 1984, working as a locum GP at a military hospital in Jeddah, I had to admit a young boy with profound paralytic polio. I dealt with him with tears in my eyes, knowing full well what his future held.

Visiting the ancient Greek site of Mystras, I learned that the duration of life then was thought to be up to 35 years. Now well into my 70s, I have been so lucky to have lived in the age of vaccination that has done so much to keep me and my fellow baby boomers fit and active for so long, and which continues to do so.Bernard Bedford*Brockenhurst, Hampshire*

● Devi Sridhar highlights the abuse against doctors who supported vaccination during the Covid-19 pandemic. I received daily death threats in 2022. Many other scientists were threatened, along with their families.

The anti-vaccination movement could continue to grow if left unchecked. Three policy changes could help reverse this. First, qualified healthcare professionals who publicly oppose vaccinations that have proven clinical benefits need to be investigated by the General Medical Council. Second, threats against doctors and scientists need to be stopped by stricter rules

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on social media, with legal action if necessary. Third, school entry requirements on vaccination need to be made more stringent. Vaccinating children and adolescents leads to more benefits than risks. Schools and universities should require proof of a range of approved vaccinations for entry, with medical explanations needed for students who are not fully vaccinated.

One in eight children in the UK are not fully vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella. And one in 12 are not vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio. Measles outbreaks have been reported in countries with poor vaccine coverage.

Vaccination cannot be mandated, but stricter entry requirements for schools and universities, supported by clear information on the benefits, could help reverse the damaging effects of the anti-vaccination movement.Dr Andrew Hill*London*

● Prof Sridhar has illuminated for me why I can vividly recall the push for polio vaccination – and the fear of the disease – when I was a child in the early 60s. The burning issue today is how to combat the tide of misinformation and propaganda masquerading as news and peddled by special interest groups. While respecting the right of freedom of speech, we must have accountability in the media.Andrew Scaife*York*

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From coaches to pushy parents, US men's soccer is married to mediocrity

Eric Wynalda

The American soccer community is still reeling from the fallout between former USMNT coach Gregg Berhalter and the Reyna family. It left the men's soccer program in an absolute shambles – without a head coach, sporting director, or general manager. The whole thing is a mess, and yet we see similar things in soccer across the US every day. It's a product of the industry we've created. Parents feel entitled because they hand over big money for their child to play – they effectively pay to have an opinion.

As the men's game in America continues to stall – the women's game is still thriving after two successive World Cup victories – the rest of the world looks at us and wonders why we can't figure it out. Why is US soccer still a laughing stock?

▲ *The Berhalter-Reyna fiasco encapsulated what many believe is wrong with soccer in the US. Photograph: ANP/Getty Images*

People don't want to hear the reasons why, because they're totally counterproductive to the industry we've created. But here's the first one: There are too many kids playing soccer.

Let me rephrase that. It's wonderful that kids are playing the beautiful game, no doubt. But there are too many parents paying thousands of dollars for their kids to play alongside truly great players. That's not helping our best ones (and it doesn't help the average ones, who are outclassed in every game they play). Our best players need to be playing with and against each other, not alongside a bunch of kids who effectively act as training cones.

The boutique club programs they're meant to play in aren't helping either. A while back, the US Soccer Federation deemphasized high school soccer in order to prioritize club soccer. That was a mistake. Our best young players now have no idea what pressure is – they play their biggest games in front of a few parents in lawn chairs rather than in a buzzing high school stadium, where pride and a sense of occasion are on the line – as are your opponent's fans, who are yelling at you for 90 minutes.

This model of travel-ball youth soccer is often derisively called "pay to play." But have you heard of "stay to play"? Many clubs have instituted policies requiring the entire team to stay at a certain hotel when they travel to tournaments. It tells you everything about where the priorities are.

The national team used to operate by creating districts, with trials. Out of that, they'd create a few state teams: In California, there'd be an A team and a B team from Cal South, and an A and B team from Cal North. They'd play against each other, and everyone knew who the best players were. It was funded by US Soccer and called the Olympic Development Program, commonly known as ODP. These days, our youth soccer arrangement is still ODP: but now it's the Over-Determined Parent program. These parents' goal is to get their child a college scholarship, and essentially a return on the tens of thousands of dollars they've invested in youth sports.

America's elite youth soccer system has been problematic for a while. When the US Soccer Federation disbanded its Development Academy in 2020, one of the main criticisms about the setup came from referees: They complained that club games weren't competitive enough! These manufactured games inevitably featured coaches telling players not to make any mistakes, and to focus solely on possession. They might as well have folded up the goals and taken them home, because nobody was taking any shots, and no one was taking any risks – or taking on an opponent. Everyone treated soccer like a giant game of hot potato.

And what did everyone say when we reached the World Cup last year? "We don't have a forward." Of course we don't! We have a thousand midfielders who are good at keeping the ball, but not at dribbling or shooting.

Major League Soccer can only do so much with what it has, but it should be taking a serious look at what happened in Italy. The Azzurri have failed to qualify for the last two World Cups because they have populated their league with more foreign talent than ever. And all they've done is make Belgium, the Netherlands, and everybody else better. Meanwhile, who has MLS helped? The league has been a wonderful opportunity for Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Concacaf nations to get better. How do you think Panama reached their first and only World Cup in 2018? Also, you can't spend millions of dollars on the likes of Thierry Henry, Wayne Rooney, Steven Gerrard, and Frank Lampard and claim to be developing players: You're preventing an opportunity for a young player to compete so that another player can comfortably retire.

Now let's look at how coaches are made. Here's a good story. A couple years ago, I gave a speech on player development at the annual United Soccer Coaches Convention. Afterward, I had a beer with a professional scout from Holland who'd heard my talk about American players. "We're very much enjoying seeing the US shoot itself in the foot every year," he said. I asked him what he meant. He smiled, paused, then said, "Out of curiosity, why are only 10 coaches – in a country of 350 million people – allowed to get their US Soccer Pro-level coaching license every year?"

He's spot on: If I were trying to ensure stagnation in America, I'd populate the federation with ideas that prohibit us from growing the number of coaches. Why are we implementing European-style programs suited for countries of 10 million people in a country of our size? In other words, America has a lot of players – but if you limit the number of coaches, what can they do?

This has been going on for years, and we never learn because we're always looking to Europe for ideas. And we keep getting the same results. Every American youth player of a certain age remembers the first time they heard that English accent. Those accents over the years have changed from German to French to Dutch to Portuguese. We end up trusting experts who aren't good enough to succeed in their own countries. Though if I were a mediocre foreign coach who couldn't get a job back home, I'd come to America.

Why? Because there's no pressure here. We're married to mediocrity.

Eric Wynalda is a broadcaster who scored 34 goals in 106 appearances for USA and played at three World Cups

2023 belongs to NHL sorcerer Connor McDavid – 2024 and 2025 probably will too

Colin Horgan

At the age of six, Connor McDavid was already special – not just talented, but driven and determined. His parents tried to get him into a competitive league for kids a year older, but he was denied. So they found a solution. They put him in a house league – with nine-year-olds. McDavid played up. He did it again when he joined the Ontario Hockey League at 15, and when he joined Team Canada's World Juniors team at 16. After that, of course, was the NHL.

Which is, technically speaking, as high as he can go. The thing is, McDavid is still ready to play up – he just can't. So, instead, he puts up seasons like this one, which include months like March. On the 14th, McDavid hit 129 points on the season, the highest single-season point total among all active NHL players. On the same day, the next highest points-earner on the year (as it has been all season) was McDavid's teammate, Leon Draisaitl, with 100 – 29 points behind. If you only took McDavid's assists into consideration, he'd still rank in the Top 20 overall points leaders on the year. On 22 March, McDavid notched his 60th goal of the season in just 72 games (Auston Matthews hit 60 in 73 games last season).

The last player to hit 60 goals in a season faster than McDavid did this year was Mario Lemieux, who did it in 70 games in 1987-88. This is McDavid's sixth season with at least 100 points, unsurprisingly putting him in a league of his own. The only other active NHL player with six 100-point seasons is Sidney Crosby, who's currently in his 18th year; McDavid's been in the league for just eight. Lemieux, who played 17 NHL seasons, managed to break the 100-point barrier 10 times. Wayne Gretzky notched 15 100-point seasons in 20 years. If McDavid keeps it up, he may surpass 150 points on the year, something nobody's done since, well, you guessed it, Lemieux (1995-96)

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and Gretzky (1990-91).

In other words, when it comes to pure scoring ability, McDavid is on pace with the greatest to ever play.

But it's not just that he can score and put up assists – which others can, too. What makes McDavid special, still, is the way in which he does it. Often on the level of some kind of sorcery. Like that time he danced through four New York Rangers to score, and then two weeks later did he same thing against Winnipeg. And it's not just that he's fast (which he is), what's key is his speed transitions, like when he shifted gears and embarrassed the Leafs' Morgan Reilly in 2020.

And then there's the hands.

When McDavid was a child, his mom asked him, "What do you want from this?" – meaning hockey, generally. McDavid had a list. Hitting the OHL at 15 was one, along with winning a Memorial Cup. He wanted to be a first overall NHL draft pick, win a Stanley Cup, and get Hockey Hall of Fame induction. With a Hall of Fame career already after only eight seasons, McDavid is only missing the hardware. The Memorial Cup got away from him in 2015. Which just leaves Lord Stanley's Cup, the only level up that remains.

Top Cheese: Appreciation for Patrice Bergeron

Per a tweet from Boston sports radio reporter Ty Anderson, Bruins coach Jim Montgomery said in March that there have "been a lot of times this season where he's gone to talk to a player about how they're doing mentally and asking where they're at and that player says, 'Patrice actually already talked to me about this, so I'm feeling better already.'" Just one reason, probably, that Montgomery considers Patrice Bergeron to be "the best captain in sports."

Bergeron is no stranger to compliments for a reason: he has a long track record of being the nicest guy in the league. "He would be, in my opinion, one of the best human beings I've ever played with," former Bruin Shawn Thornton told Sportsnet in 2018. Earlier this season, just before facing-off

▲ *Connor McDavid scored his 60th goal of the season in just 72 games. Photograph: Perry Nelson/USA Today Sports*

against the Sabres, Bergeron asked Buffalo's Tage Thompson how his wife, who'd had a cancerous mass removed from her leg in 2019, is doing. "It's just the kind of guy he is," Thompson said later. "He's just a genuine guy, cares about other people."

A study released last summer based on interviews with former professional hockey players (including many from the NHL) found that players feel pressured to keep issues like pain, concussions, addictions, and mental health to themselves. Even though players are aware of resources made available by their teams, the researchers found that "no one is willing to use it out of fear" that personal disclosures won't stay confidential. The lead researcher told CTV News that the players they interviewed said "there was a lot of talk in the industry but not much changing systematically."

In an environment like that, empathy like Bergeron's goes a long way.

Cup chase

In March, the Bruins became the first team to clinch a 2023 playoff spot (in just 64 games, the third-fastest to do so since 1995-96) – but also lost to the Oilers, Red Wings, and Blackhawks. Reading too much into those losses be a mistake, but they're notable nevertheless, for a team whose previous loss was way back on 11 February.

Carolina will be without key forward Andrei Svechnikov through the playoffs. Svechnikov suffered a torn ACL during a game on 13 March against Las Vegas when he appeared to catch the toe of his skate blade in the ice – a potentially devastating blow for the team's playoff hopes. Elsewhere in the East, all but three playoff spots are now locked in.

Meanwhile, out West, the Seattle Kraken are sitting in a (wildcard) playoff spot – a significant upgrade from their inaugural season, which saw them finish last in the Pacific. Unlike the East, however, as of the final week of March all the Western playoff spots are still un-clinched – it'll be a race to the finish.

Bedard chase

Despite not technically being the worst team in the NHL, the San Jose Sharks tanked hard enough recently to be the first team officially eliminated from playoff contention this season. At the same time, the Sharks' recent form has propelled them upwards among the list of teams likeliest to secure the first overall draft pick (ie: Connor Bedard). While Columbus still hold the top spot on that ranking, with a 25% chance at securing the first pick, the Sharks have moved into second, with a 13.5% chance, according to Tankathon.

While they aren't really in the chase for Bedard, after high pre-season expectations, the Ottawa Senators are poised to miss the playoffs. But they may get a new owner. Actor/businessman Ryan Reynolds has recently expressed interest in buying a stake in the team. In March T-Mobile announced a $1.35bn purchase of Ka'ena Corporation, including its subsidiary Mint Mobile – the wireless firm of which Reynolds owns a majority stake. Meanwhile, Senators winger Tim Stützle has registered 51 points (24 goals and 27 assists) since 1 January – quite the pace.

Clip of the month

Down 2-0 in Seattle, Anaheim were looking for something to help get them back into the game as the second period began. Less than a minute in, Trevor Zegras gave it a try.

Not bad. But could he do it in heels and a dress? TNT commentator Jennifer Botterill did (and broke the TV studio in the process).

Elsewhere in the league (and beyond)

San Jose, Chicago, and Sunrise: The trend of players and teams refusing to wear Pride-themed warmup jerseys continues. San Jose goaltender James Reimer and Florida Panthers' brothers Marc and Eric Staal all claimed wearing Pride jerseys conflicts with their faith – while at the same time suggesting, inaccurately, that being LGBTQ+ is a choice (one wonders when they chose to be straight!). When reporters pointed out to Eric Staal that he wore a Pride jersey as a member of the Montreal Canadiens, he reportedly denied it – despite there being photographic evidence. Meanwhile, the Chicago Blackhawks decided as an organization that none of their players would wear Pride jerseys, apparently out of concern for Russia's anti-LGBTQ+ "propaganda" laws, which ban promoting "non-traditional sexual relations." (Multiple other Russian-born players, including Evgeni Malkin and Sergei Bobrovsky, have worn the jerseys without incident.)

Philadelphia: The Flyers parted ways with their GM, Chuck Fletcher in March, replacing him (temporarily, for now) with former Flyer Daniel Briere, who was almost immediately embroiled in a scandal created by his son, Carson, who was seen tossing a woman's wheelchair down a flight of stairs at a nightclub in Eire, Pennsylvania. Briere The Younger has been suspended from his university, Mercyhurst. Daniel Briere said Carson's actions were "inexcusable." Carson Briere was later charged with criminal mischief and disorderly conduct.

Minneapolis: Shout-out to the Mahtomedi Zephyrs, who won the Class A division of the annual state-wide high school hockey tournament that wrapped up on 10 March. The Zephyrs pulled off a thrilling double-OT victory in front of a packed house at the Xcel Energy Center, which is usually home to the Wild (check out the mayhem below). The Class AA championship went to the Minnetonka Skippers. Hockey continues to be alive and well in Minnesota – not to mention some superb hockey hair.

Michael Jordan's big score: why his NBA ownership tenure is far from a failure

Andrew Lawrence

It used to be that only the truly exceptional were called "the Michael Jordan of" their particular arena: of acting (Viola Davis), of fibbing (George Santos), of the Democratic party (Barack Obama). "They know what you're talking about," Obama said before bestowing the Chicago Bulls legend with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, "because Michael Jordan is the Michael Jordan of greatness." And now he's poised to win another title: the Michael Jordan of dealmakers.

Last week came news that the six-time NBA champion was in serious talks about selling a portion of his majority stake in the Charlotte Hornets. This comes four years after he sold a slice of the franchise to a group led by the venture capitalist Gabe Plotkin – the Michael Jordan of short-selling, according to some. It's unclear whether Jordan is trying to bring in investment, or whether he wants to cash out of the league entirely. In the latter case, his take would be an 80% slice of a pie valued at more than $1bn. As investments go, it's nothing but net.

But it isn't just the money that makes this a big deal. For the better part of two decades the Chicago Bulls great has been the Michael Jordan of front office executives, exceptional by virtue of being the only Black majority team owner in America's big four sports leagues. A divestment may leave him better off, but a larger movement toward diversity, inclusion and fair play will be poorer in the end.

All of which is to say: this isn't a case of one bored rich guy selling to another who's never known the thrill of victory. This is for higher stakes. There's so much to consider – from what it means for North Carolina's most prominent professional franchise to lose its favorite son as a steward, to whether the Hornets even have much more room to grow while stuck in the NBA's eighth-smallest media market.

Fox Sports' Colin Cowherd, however, could only reach the lowest hanging fruit – the team's record under the greatest player to ever lace 'em up. (Note: born and raised Chicagoan here.)

"He tried baseball, he failed," Cowherd fumed last week. "He tried ownership, he was awful. He tried the Wizards, it bombed. Everybody understands that, take Scottie Pippen and Phil Jackson, this whole Michael Jordan mythology is just that." And this is coming from someone who professes respect for Jordan's singular air. Imagine what MJ's real haters must think.

In their defense, there's certainly no arguing with the scoreboard. Since Jordan bought a stake in the Hornets in 2006, Charlotte have posted a winning record just four times in 17 tries. That's including this season, which finds Charlotte racing to the bottom in hopes of winning the Victor Wembanyama sweepstakes.

Worse, the best player of his generation has demonstrated a weak eye for talent – reaching to draft shaggy Gonzaga star Adam Morrison, splurging on a new deal for underachieving center Emeka Okafor, blowing up one rebuild after another, never hitting on a coach or general manager anywhere near as good as the odd couple he had in Chicago.

The close friendship between Jordan and Charles Barkley was destroyed when the TNT analyst castigated Jordan for insulating himself with yes-men. "He called me and the last thing I heard was, 'Motherfucker, fuck you. You're supposed to be my boy,'" Barkley recalled in a recent guest appearance on the podcast All the Smoke. "I said, 'Man, I gotta do my job.' We haven't spoken since that night."

Given Jordan's reputation as a serial competitor with a knack for refining slights real and imagined into fuel for conquest, you'd think the criticism – which was hardly exclusive to Barkley – would have launched the Hornets into rarefied air. Instead, they barely got off the ground.

But what about Jordan's other achievements in Charlotte? Recall: when he bought into the team in 2006, they were called the Charlotte *Bobcats* – a vanity play by previous owner Bob Johnson, the BET co-founder who relaunched basketball in the Queen City after the original Hornets relocated to New Orleans in 2002. It was Jordan who restored the team's brand and clawed back its heritage from the New Orleans Pelicans, effectively undoing what had

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been a messy divorce from the city.

Jordan called the un-branding “an historic day” – and he wasn’t kidding. Ask any Carolina hoops nut: That smirking Hornets logo – and the visions it conjures of Larry Johnson streaking through the air, of Alonzo Mourning bulling his way through the paint, and of Muggsy Bogues confounding defenses off the dribble – belongs nowhere else.

Those yes-men? A fair few were people of color and women, far more than could be found in other front offices when Jordan took over. Those misses on court? No doubt, Jordan’s touch was dulled by his distance from the game. But it’s hard to crush the guy for not trying when he hired Larry Brown, brought back all-time wins leader Paul Silas and made San Antonio assistant James Borrego the NBA’s first Latino head coach. What’s more, there’s no question Jordan’s Hornets have turned a corner since bringing on former Lakers GM Mitch Kupchak, who has built a promising young roster around Miles Bridges and LaMelo Ball.

This sale? Isn’t the point of investing was to *make*money? When Jordan consolidated his purchase of the Charlotte franchise for $275m in 2010, it seemed as if he had more money than sense – but only just. Back then Forbes estimated Jordan was worth $550m, a pile that included all the money he made from Nike – a company, a forthcoming feature film reminds us, that was going nowhere before he set foot in that first pair of Airs. That failed comeback with the Wizards that Cowherd referred to began with Jordan being invited aboard as part-owner of that team and the NHL’s Capitals, which bolstered his portfolio.

Michael Jordan is the only Black majority owner of a major US professional sports team. Photograph: Jacob Kupferman/Getty Images

More to the point: Jordan got in early. He parlayed the wealth he accumulated on the court into a proper ownership share at a time when player salaries were relatively modest and most owners had made their ransoms in real estate. He bridged the gap between the owners and players, helping the former appreciate the latter’s reasons for walking off the job during the 2020 playoffs after the police shooting of Jacob Blake.

In the age of billionaire venture capitalists and tech moguls, it’s tough to see LeBron James or another high-earning NBA star pulling off as spectacular an upward move. Former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer changed NBA math forever with his $2bn acquisition of the LA Clippers.

And while it’s true that bought a halfway decent team in a top media market, it was also almost a decade ago. Since then, the Houston Rockets sold for $2.2bn, the Brooklyn Nets for $3.2bn and the Phoenix Suns just went for a record $4bn. Given those prices and the NBA’s global expansion, the Hornets’ true value could be a lot higher than the $1.6bn figure that has been thrown about

There are some who will always see Jordan as a failure for anything he does outside the Bulls, whether he’s playing baseball or working as a Nascar owner. (And with Jordan seemingly looking to get out of NBA so soon after getting into stock car racing, it’s hard not to be reminded of that famous Junior Johnson quote about how to make a small fortune in motor sports: “Start with a big one.”)

But the fact is that even Jordan’s disappointing tenure as Hornets owner is a staggering success. By standing apart for so long, he gave other athletes turned executives another reason to be like Mike. It’s just a shame it’s him who wants to sell and not, say, New York’s James Dolan. It’s hard to imagine the NBA without Jordan as a final boss. Whoever follows him will have big shoes to fill. The Michael Jordan of shoe-filling, no doubt.

Group reportedly meets Snyder’s $6bn asking price for Washington Commanders

Associated Press

A group led by Josh Harris and Mitchell Rales has submitted a fully financed bid for the NFL’s Washington Commanders, according to two people with knowledge of the situation.

The Harris/Rales group, which includes basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson, is one of multiple bidders involved in the sale process. Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta and Canadian billionaire Steve Apostolopoulos are also in the running.

ESPN first reported the Harris/Rales group submitted the bid, meeting Snyder’s $6bn asking price.

Harris, who owns the NBA’s Philadelphia 76ers and NHL’s New Jersey Devils, brought on Rales, a billionaire who also grew up in Maryland, just outside Washington, earlier this year. Johnson, who has ownership experience with Major League Baseball’s Los Angeles Dodgers and others, later joined the group.

Last year, with multiple investigations ongoing into the team’s workplace culture and finances, longtime owner Dan Snyder and his wife Tanya hired a firm to explore selling part or all of the team. That came two weeks after Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay said there was “merit to remove” Snyder, something that would take an unprecedented vote of 24 of the other 31 owners.

Dan Snyder has a strained relationship with many other NFL owners. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

Selling the team would avoid going down that road, though the process has dragged on long enough that the situation may not be fully resolved by the end of the annual league meeting this week in Arizona.

Once Snyder accepts an offer, he must submit the bidder’s name to the NFL for approval. That hasn’t happened yet, a source told the AP on Monday. Three-quarters of the owners would need to approve any sale.

“I think he’s put the team up for sale. I believe that something is close to happening,” New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft said Monday. “I don’t know that for sure. We’ll wait and see what happens.”

Snyder and his attorneys have demanded that NFL owners and the league indemnify him against future legal liability and costs if he sells the team, a source told the AP. Two owners said they were angered by Snyder’s demand for indemnification but told the AP that they want to let the sale process play out before taking any action.

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said Snyder’s situation has changed their relationship.

“I think that it’s a little more formal, but I think it’s that way because of the various issues that are involved here,” Jones said. “It’s not ‘lovey-dovey,’ but it’s not really strained in any way.”

Snyder and the team are still under investigation by former US Attorney Mary Jo White, who was retained by the league to look into various aspects of the organization stemming from a congressional review into workplace misconduct that also included a referral to the Federal Trade Commission for potential business improprieties.

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Undefeated South Carolina set up mouthwatering Final Four clash with Iowa

Associated Press

Aliyah Boston had 22 points and 10 rebounds and top-seeded South Carolina used their smothering defense to stop Maryland 86-75 on Monday night and reach their third straight Final Four.

Do-it-all star Caitlin Clark and the Iowa Hawkeyes await in the national semi-finals in Dallas on Friday, a game featuring two of the biggest stars in the sport. That can wait for now. Her players deserve that, South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said.

"I just want to enjoy this and just give our players an opportunity to be talked about," Staley said. "The joy that I feel for this team to be able to be where they are, I'm just really happy."

Staley's team improved to 36-0 this season with their 42nd straight victory, dating back to last year's NCAA title run. The Gamecocks are now two games away from repeating as champions and completing the 10th undefeated season in the women's game.

▲ South Carolina celebrate making their third straight Final Four. Photograph: Jim Dedmon/USA Today Sports

The Gamecocks hugged and jumped when it was over. It's the fifth Final Four since 2015, all under Staley. She'll try for her third national title next week.

"Not a lot of teams can say they're able to do this," Boston said. "So for us to be able to do it feels really good, and it's such a blessing we won't ever take for granted."

In Monday's other game, Elizabeth Kitley scored 25 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, Georgia Amoore added 24 points and top-seeded Virginia Tech advanced to the Final Four for the first time with an 84-74 win over No 3 seed Ohio State.

For the seventh time in the past 10 Final Fours there will be a first-time participant and it's the champions of the ACC, adding another accomplishment to the best season in school history.

Playing in their first regional final, Virginia Tech won their 15th straight game and will head to the Final Four undefeated in more than two months. The Hokies will face LSU in the national semi-finals on Friday in Dallas.

"We're not just going to the Final Four. We're in the Final Four. That's something that means the world to me," Virginia Tech coach Kenny Brooks said.

Scott McTominay stuns Spain to extend Scotland's perfect start to qualifying

Ewan Murray at Hampden Park

In November 1984, Steve Clarke stood alongside his father on the north terrace of Hampden Park as a Scotland team inspired by Kenny Dalglish swatted aside Spain. Almost 40 years on, Clarke found himself masterminding a result which is arguably even more impressive given the football paths subsequently taken by the nations in question.

Scotland, who sit proudly atop their Euro 2024 qualifying section, were fully worth their first win over the Spanish since Clarke was that paying punter. Two-goal Scott McTominay was the hero, but every Scotland player may as well have worn capes.

There will be an inquest, naturally, in Spain regarding the paucity of performance in Luis de la Fuente's second game in charge. Yet the Scots, completely rejuvenated by Clarke, are worthy of huge praise. They already have next summer's finals in Germany in their sights.

The draw between Georgia and Norway, confirmed before kick-off here, raised Scottish spirits. This is likely to be a tight qualifying section, in which the Norwegians have taken just a point from two matches. Scotland were once accustomed to such sluggish starts.

▲ Scott McTominay runs away in delight – with Kieran Tierney at his side – after scoring his and Scotland's second goal to seal victory over Spain. Photograph: Ian MacNicol/Getty

The Tartan Army's optimism levels rose even further within seven minutes. The national stadium's playing surface, a talking point given persistent troubles, assisted the hosts as Pedro Porro slipped when trying to cut out a Ryan Christie pass. Andy Robertson stole in, the Scotland captain squaring for McTominay. Kepa Arrizabalaga will cite the deflection McTominay's low shot took off Iñigo Martínez on its way into the net but he should still have done better.

McTominay's goal, his third in just 13 minutes of international football, was reward for a high-octane Scotland start. John McGinn snapped at Spanish heels. Grant Hanley, Kieran Tierney and Ryan Porteous won their defensive battles. A visiting team showing eight changes from the weekend success over Norway – a matter which raised eyebrows – was struggling with Scotland's intensity. Christie could and probably should have doubled the hosts' lead after a bursting run from midfield. The Bournemouth midfielder prodded wide.

A Joselu header that hit the crossbar hinted at a Spanish awakening. De la Fuente's men did gradually find their feet during a wonderfully frenetic opening period, without seriously troubling Angus Gunn in the home goal.

Porro sought a red card for Robertson after the Liverpool full-back planted his shoulder into his opponent's chin. Robertson escaped with a booking; a less lenient referee would have curtailed the 29-year-old's night. Porro, now the pantomime villain, had his every subsequent touch vehemently booed. For all he embellished the incident, Robertson was silly to flirt with danger.

The half ended with a glaring Scottish chance. Robertson's looping ball from defence found Dykes, who raced through on Arrizabalaga. The striker flicked high over the bar with Scottish fans awaiting goal number two.

Porro was removed by Spain during the interval, presumably to spare him further public ridicule. The match referee, Sandro Scharer, took up position as the fourth official having suffered an injury. It was unclear whether this was to his ears, which would have been wholly understandable given the level of whining from those in red in the first 45 minutes.

Scotland's second goal owed everything to the tenacity of Tierney. The Arsenal man left Dani Carvajal, who had replaced Porro, for dust on Scotland's left flank. Tierney's cross was blocked by David Garcia but only as far as McTominay. The midfielder returned the ball first time and with interest, with Arrizabalaga rendered helpless. This suddenly had all the makings of a famous Scottish football occasion.

▲ Scott McTominay celebrates after scoring the first goal against Spain. Photograph: Robbie Jay Barratt/AMA/Getty Images

Only the bar denied Scotland a 57th minute third from a swerving McGinn free-kick. Spain were now in panic mode. Iago Aspas flicked over and Nico Williams shot tamely at Gunn after bamboozling Porteous. Amazingly, De la Fuente waited until the 79th minute to introduce Gavi.

At this stage, the only serious danger to Scotland looked to be fatigue. Even tiredness could not deny Clarke's men. The navy blue wall stood perfectly firm.

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Chelsea's Kai Havertz: 'From day one I felt a special relationship with donkeys'

Sid Lowe

"Some of my teammates call me Donkey." A grin creeps across Kai Havertz's face. "It's not because of my football," the Chelsea forward adds, as if he needed to. Instead, he says, it is something deeper. "From day one, I felt a special relationship with donkeys. It's a very calm animal: maybe I personalised myself in them because I'm calm too. They chill all day, don't do much, just want to live their life. I loved them always. And when I lost, I would go to the sanctuary. You look at the animals, see something human in them. It was a kind of recovery, a place I felt peace."

It is a cold, wet morning in Wimbledon and Havertz is talking about football and life, the game and everything that goes with it, including politics, money and war. In a clear, calm tone, he talks about change at Chelsea and throughout football: of players, coaches, staff, even owners. In himself, too. About scoring the winner in the Champions League final, the release and responsibility, and the dreams players pursue and the pressure that pursues them, exposed early. But the first thing – and the last thing – is animals.

Which, it turns out, is what most moves him. Havertz's mother was a lawyer, his father a policeman. When he was little, growing up in Aachen, they gave him a cuddly donkey. When he turned 18, they gave him three real ones: "a special gift, an adoption at a sanctuary". The first was called Toni – "like Rüdiger" – his latest is called Hope, saved from the butcher, a rope literally round his neck. "He was already dead, now he has a good life, so these are examples," the 23-year-old says.

That, he says, was where it started, an idea that formed more fully following floods in Germany in 2021 and culminated in the launch on Wednesday of the Kai Havertz Stiftung, his charity inspired by animal welfare and expanded to youth development and elderly care. As he discusses plans, those experiences are revealed as having formed both his personality and his development as a player, the donkeys' sanctuary has too. Their calm was aspiration and comfort, a means of learning to let go. To the point where he says: "Football's not the most important thing in my life. Other things are maybe 100 times more important. Maybe it's not easy to say and people don't like it, but it's how I feel."

Don't misunderstand him. Havertz calls football "the best thing in the world". This is the game he loves and he talks about it with depth, enthusiasm and honesty. But the pressure can be intense and these have been tumultuous times that have seen sanctions, players paying for petrol and hotels, a sale, and dozens of signings at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea sitting 10th in the Premier League. And Havertz not only insists that "no one can say I don't give 100%," but also that perspective, having some other place to go, *helps*. The way he tells it, it always has.

▲ *Chelsea's Kai Havertz: 'I made my childhood dream come true.' Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian*

So much has happened it's hard to fit it all in, to explain what they lived through, as people as much as players. "You have the big picture where you think: 'What is happening?' And you should think that, you should think: 'This is not right,'" he says. "Then you have the club. As a player, you don't notice the ownership change so much but we have a new team, new manager, new staff. A completely new changing room, so many personalities. You have to adapt, build a relationship. I played with Jorginho for two and a half years, he changed next to me, I loved being with him and then ..."

Havertz laughs. "He calls me one evening and says: 'I'm gone.' I was like: 'What the? How is this possible?' This is how quick things change. It's a human thing. You just have to accept it, it's football. It's my sixth year as a professional and my seventh coach: in Germany I had four or five and it's three at Chelsea. A dozen players arrived since the summer; it's not easy. Enzo [Fernández] and [Mykhailo] Mudryk have come for a lot of money and they're only [22], you know? You cannot expect them to be Neymar straight away. It's like me: it takes time."

"For me the price was a big thing," admits Havertz, who joined Chelsea for £72m from Bayer Leverkusen in 2020. "I was Chelsea's most expensive player. I don't understand how so much money is paid but it is normal in football: look at our recent transfers. That brings pressure because people think you are Messi. I was still 20, 21. People don't see that; they see the price so you have to be great from day one. You can feel it, the tension. You read it, hear it. I came during Covid."

Was that actually a good thing? There's a laugh. "Maybe, yes. Because the first six months weren't that good. Maybe [if they're there] the fans boo you. You feel the cameras on you and I am not raised like this. I don't want to be in the middle, everyone looking. It was quite crazy at the beginning. At Leverkusen people looked as well, but if you add the price here ..." Havertz points at his head. "I felt it, obviously.

"It's a process. When I was 17, 18, 19, football controlled my life, you know? If I had a bad game, I'd go one week where ..." There's a pause. "I don't know ..."

You had to go and see the donkeys? "Exactly. When you're young, you read what people say. You think: maybe they're right, maybe you are an idiot, you are rubbish at football. You kind of believe it."

And what about when they say you're great? Do you believe that, too? There's a moment when Havertz addresses that old line about sticking to football and he says: "Fans might think: 'He's concentrating on something else,' but there are worse things than having a foundation." Yet donkeys aren't the typical footballer's thing. Asked if he's different, he concedes a maybe, talks about his upbringing, a grandmother who "hates arrogance", but he is also quick to dispel the myth.

"There's an image of footballers, all fancy and diamonds and this and that. I have met players who spend so much on things where you think: 'Why do you do this?' There are players who don't care but others do. It's not always about saying: 'I did this.' That's sometimes a bit fake. I've met different characters. Toni Kroos is one: calm, down to earth, doesn't care about flashy stuff. He knows life is not only football. N'Golo Kanté is another. He's had the same phone for 10 years, doesn't care about cars, doesn't care about clothes.

"You cannot judge people because of [spending]. If that makes them happy, I don't care. Maybe in their heart they are also good people, they just want to act cool. Sometimes maybe it's kind of a protection."

That's when Havertz, 24 in June, tells a story of buying an expensive "fancy rucksack" like the other lads. He was 17 and "maybe [acting] a bit too cool". It's a small thing, he says, that illustrates the point. "It was white with gold, flash, but I just thought: 'It's not me.' I couldn't take myself seriously. I spoke to my parents about this. If I changed they would say: 'Kai, it's not you, just stop it.'" So where is the backpack now? Across the room, Havertz's sister Lea cracks up. "I've got it!" she says.

"You have to be stable," Havertz says. "If you're playing badly, it doesn't make you the worst person on earth and the highs aren't real. Everything moves fast: the last few months is a good example. Everyone's upset with me, I don't score, I play rubbish, this is bad, that's bad, they have to sell me. Now I score and everyone says I am the best player. People love me now but maybe in two weeks they hate me again. No matter how well I played, I come home and my girlfriend wants me to put the plates into the dishwasher."

There is a calmness there, a stability, an optimism which is easier to manage precisely because he knows success, even acceptance, can be fleeting. If all is not well in the league, maybe something is building in Europe, maybe it is possible to see a parallel with 2021, the Champions League and Chelsea's salvation under a new manager. "One hundred per cent," he says.

That was a triumph; it was also, he admits, "a relief" at the end of his first season. "Frank Lampard signed me, we had good chats and he helped me even though it wasn't working out for him, so I am grateful," Havertz recalls. "Then [Thomas] Tuchel gave me a different idea of football. Every detail counts, every centimetre, how you touch the ball, how you control, where you pass, which foot, movement, creating spaces: he's just top level. To come and win the Champions League in six months says it all.

"My brother and I used to watch every Champions League game and to hold the trophy with your family on the pitch was such a relief. I scored this goal, I can be happy. I made my childhood dream come true. And the ambition is still there. In the league we are not very good and we feel for the fans but against Dortmund, the atmosphere was the best I have seen. You feel the excitement. The Premier League is big and winning it may be even more difficult but the Champions League is different. Hearing that anthem, playing at night: it's special."

Havertz speaks well of Graham Potter, calling him "very good for Chelsea even though he gets criticism; in the changing room everyone knows his qualities". He also seems to have found his place in the team, even if it's not entirely clear what to call it. "I was getting annoyed with people asking me this," he jokes. "I can say I'm not a typical No 9." More importantly, he seems to have found his place, full stop.

▲ *Chelsea's Kai Havertz and teammates with the Champions League trophy. His goal was enough to beat Manchester City in the 2021 final. Photograph: Nick Potts/PA*

As he is talking, his partner Sophia comes in with their dog. Soon he is telling Hope's story, talking about rescuing dogs from the earthquake in Turkey, the projects on his mind, the pets that, along with a ball, made his childhood "perfect": rabbits, guinea pigs, cats, dogs, a horse in the field over the back fence. The donkeys that gave him peace and a nickname.

"When you lose, you are in a bad mood still. But it has switched. You develop, mature. My girlfriend gave up her whole life in Germany to come here. I don't want to go home and make her day bad. You feel the pressure every day at a big club like this [but] when I took the penalty against Dortmund there was a moment when I just looked into the crowd and thought: 'As a kid I dreamed of being here,'" Havertz says. "When I was 10 I couldn't imagine taking the penalty to take Chelsea into the Champions League quarter-final.

"Obviously you are nervous but I was able to really enjoy the moment rather than feel the pressure. And that's the most important thing: remember, you started playing because you love the game.

"That is what I have tried to change because before it was different. I would go to the sanctuary after games to be with the donkeys, just switch off my whole body. It was such a good feeling, a recovery. Over the last few years I've realised I can give something back. It was clear to me. It should be clear to everyone. That's more important. Football is a good way to make people happy, give them joy, something to hold on to, to help. But there are other ways. And to always look at football 24/7 is not healthy."

> *No matter how well I played, I come home and my girlfriend wants me to put the plates into the dishwasher*

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Lionel Messi scores hat-trick to pass 100 Argentina goals in rout of Curaçao

Reuters

Lionel Messi passed the 100-goals mark for Argentina while scoring a hat-trick in their 7-0 friendly win over Curaçao. The Paris Saint-Germain forward reached a century of international goals on his 174th cap when he opened the scoring after 20 minutes, Giovani Lo Celso setting him up in the centre of the box to slot home a low shot.

"We will never stop celebrating and I think it's fair and deserved," Argentina's coach, Lionel Scaloni, said. "I hope there will be more [Messi goals]. He deserves all the praise and it's good that these goals were on Argentine soil, that has a special value too."

Nicolás González doubled Argentina's lead shortly after with a header before Messi got his second with a trademark curling shot in at the far post in the 33rd minute. Messi set up Enzo Fernández to fire home from the edge of the box two minutes later and the 35-year-old completed his hat-trick in the 37th minute with a simple finish after another Lo Celso pass.

The substitute Ángel Di María scored a penalty in the 78th minute and Gonzalo Montiel, who put away Argentina's last penalty to beat France in the World Cup final, completed the rout three minutes from time.

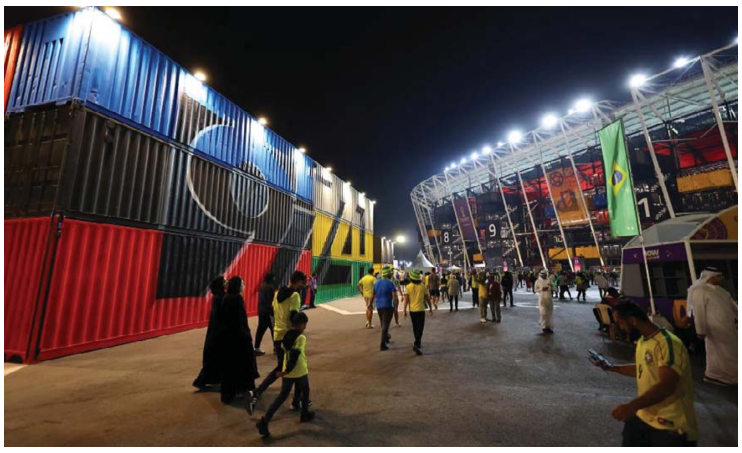
Broken promises? Future of Qatar's World Cup stadiums still up in the air

Nick Ames in Doha

The workers' accommodation next to Ahmad bin Ali Stadium is at least two thirds empty now. Those who remain can make the short walk from the central block to the mess room, where food and drink are available. The other two structures have virtually been hollowed out since the World Cup: one of the alleys between them is all but blocked by a pile of bedframes and mattresses, of which there are plenty because the inhabitants lived four to a room. Presumably someone, at some point, will arrive to clear up the extensive clutter; further behind is a spread of binbags and other trash. An employee estimates 100 men remain: they are contracted to the two firms who built the venue and, while the showpiece event is long gone, there is still work to be done here.

Exactly how much remains to be seen. These workers appear to be carrying out routine maintenance but, according to Qatar's post-tournament legacy plan for the site, Ahmad bin Ali Stadium will soon be scaled back from its present 45,000 capacity to a more manageable 20,000. The removed seats in its upper tier will be donated to venues domestically and "nations in need of sporting infrastructure"; a newly compact arena will be neatly sized for domestic and continental games played by the local club, Al Rayyan.

The question is when, exactly, any of this will happen. Qatar's future promises for its World Cup venues appear entirely logical: they evince understanding that a tiny state should have no need for eight stadiums that each hold between 40,000 and 89,000 supporters so five of them are due to downsize and Lusail Stadium, which staged the final, is slated to be repurposed entirely. Stadium 974, partly



▲ *Stadium 974 hosted seven matches during the Fifa World Cup but has yet to be dismantled. Photograph: Robbie Jay Barratt/AMA/Getty Images*

fitted out with shipping containers, has been celebrated as the first temporary venue in World Cup history. It is to be reinstalled elsewhere: Tunisia, if you believe the word around Doha, or maybe another country in need.

It is not the best look to keep any recipients waiting. Stadium 974 was highly intact on a visit three months after the World Cup final. Similarly to Ahmad bin Ali, there was no sign of any rush to take it apart. One worker at the site speculated its lifespan will expand another "one or two years"; another assessed his own future and wondered if his contract would be renewed for the Asian Cup, which Qatar will hold early next year after stepping in when China pulled out.

No football has been played there since Brazil's rout of South Korea on 5 December. Further out of town, Al Janoub Stadium and Al Thumama Stadium have both been used for AFC Champions League games this year. The pledge is the capacities of both will shrink from 40,000 to 20,000; the lower figure looks comfortable given the biggest attendance in those fixtures was 16,320, in a semi-final between the local side Al-Duhail and Saudi giants Al-Hilal. A source familiar with the workings of Al Janoub expressed surprise when the Guardian posited that the capacity might reduce sometime soon.

There was no sign of major structural work taking place on visits to Education City or Al Bayt, which became England's second home last winter. The upper tier of Al Bayt is claimed to be earmarked for a hotel and mall, the 68,000 capacity being slashed as a result; Education City is to halve in size and potentially become a base for a revamped Qatar women's team. The playing surface at Lusail, assiduously tended to, could seemingly be used this weekend if required but there is no date for its next fixture and nor is any timeline available for its transformation into a multifaceted community hub.

There is no suggestion Qatar's plans have been shelved or will not be fulfilled. But the picture has certainly changed since June 2021, when Fifa published its Greenhouse Gas Accounting report for the tournament. The report said: "The post-tournament phase stretches from the end of the FWC [World Cup] phase to 25 June 2023. During this time, the temporary elements of the venues, such as temporary seats, the Ras Abu Aboud Stadium and the overlay infrastructure, will be demounted."

It is clear that target has slipped dramatically. The Supreme Committee did not respond to a request for timelines around each of the stadiums with temporary elements. Fifa, though, admitted they have become fuzzy. "Given Qatar's bids for upcoming international sport events, the final timeline for the adaptation of the World Cup stadiums is not confirmed," it told the Guardian. "The exact timing is still to be confirmed, among others because of the said events possibly taking place in Qatar."

The Asian Cup and the 2030 Asian Games are currently the only major events in Qatar's calendar, although the country has been weighing up a bid for the 2036 Olympics and Fifa's refashioned Club World Cup, which will take place quadrennially from 2025, may well be an attractive target.

Locally, the Asian Cup is cited as a major reason for Qatar's foot-dragging over the execution of its stadium legacy. No bid had been made for that tournament when the plans were drawn up. Yet the hesitancy to put at least some of its schemes in motion appears strange given the tournament rarely attracts high attendances: during its 2019 iteration in the United Arab Emirates, an accessible regional hub like Qatar, only 24 of 51 games drew crowds of over 10,000. When Qatar last hosted the tournament, in 2011, that figure was 15 of 32. Reduced capacities would surely be adequate in most cases and Qatar has five other stadiums that can hold between 13,000 and 21,000.

Any delays also pose environmental questions. A rarely used or oversized stadium still requires electricity and water for its daily maintenance. Qatar has been assiduous in attempting to maximise energy efficiency and in its use of recycled materials. It has pledged a carbon neutral World Cup but the extent to which added emis-

▲ *Furniture dumped outside workers' accommodation near the Ahmad bin Ali stadium. Photograph: Nick Ames/The Guardian*

sions caused by stretched timescales will be included in post-tournament data is unclear. Fifa said: "The shortening or extension of the timeline of [the] process will not affect the organisers' commitments in connection with carbon management as per the event's sustainability strategy."

While it is not the domain of Fifa or the Supreme Committee, the impact around some of the grounds' surrounding infrastructures also appears severe. Lusail Boulevard, virtually empty on a typical non-tournament day, has around 30 scarcely used food and drink outlets along with a Sainsbury's, fully stocked with both fresh and non-perishable products, where staff routinely outnumber customers. The construction of a futuristic new city continues apace, with accordingly hefty consumption, but it is hard to see how all the vast new developments will be populated any time soon.

Meanwhile, as Qatar decides how and when to honour its promises, the workers next door to Ahmad bin Ali dodge the rubbish and rest up for another day. They will be back tomorrow and the day after: that much is certain. Their host country, though, is offering little clarity about the implementation of its post-World Cup vision.

News Corp's Australian chair claims 'activist' athletes hurt grassroots sport

Amanda Meade

Rupert Murdoch's Australian chief executive has accused athletes of hurting sport when they become "activists" and reject sponsorships from mining or energy companies.

The executive chair Australasia of News Corp Australia, Michael Miller, told a sporting leadership conference that athletes who reject sponsors don't lose any pay but the "grassroots" sporting organisations suffer as a result of their activism.

News Corp is the largest publisher in Australian with mastheads including the Australian, the Daily Telegraph, the Herald Sun and news.com.au, and the pay TV channel Sky News Australia.

Miller appeared to reference the withdrawal of Hancock Prospecting's $15m sponsorship from Netball Aus-

Continued *on page 45*

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tralia last year after a player backlash.

The backlash was sparked by First Nations squad member Donnell Wallam who expressed an objection to wearing a uniform with the Hancock logo on it because the founder of Hancock Prospecting and father of Gina Rinehart, Lang Hancock, suggested Indigenous Australians should be sterilised.

Speaking on a panel at the SportNXT Shaping the Future of Sport conference in Melbourne, Miller said: "Stars are your biggest strength and your biggest liability.

"When sporting stars become activists, it has a negative impact on the growth of the game, in terms of athletes choosing who their sponsors are and who they will and won't work with.

"You employ people, you come to work accepting that the team, the company you work for, make decisions your behalf, and for athletes to take a fairly firm decision they don't want to take a sponsorship from a mining company, from an energy company … their pay isn't going to suffer, but ultimately it's the grassroots and pathway programs that will."

▲ Ramez Sheikh, managing director of NBA Asia, Michael Miller, executive chair of News Corp Australasia, and Kate Roffey, president of Melbourne FC, on stage. Miller told the Shaping the Future of Sport conference athletes 'feel they have permission' to make statements about sponsors. Photograph: George Sal

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Questioned by the moderator, ABC journalist Tracey Holmes, Miller doubled down on his remarks.

"I find that athletes feel they have permission to make those statements, but other organisations wouldn't accept it," he said. "If you don't want to work for that organisation, you leave and work elsewhere."

Another panellist, the president of the Melbourne Football Club, Kate Roffey, disagreed with Miller.

Roffey said she supported her players, which she called her greatest assets, and if they had issues with sponsors, they were well within their rights to speak up.

"It's only courtesy, it's not my responsibility to ask them what's important to them as athletes," Roffey said.

Miller was critical of sporting codes that made it difficult for the media to cover them by scheduling multiple matches at the same time and said it was important to give the media access to stories and personalities.

He also said Foxtel's sports streaming service, Kayo, had figures that showed more men were watching women's sport than women and it was a challenge getting women to watch women's sports.

Peter Bol's lawyers claim 'blunder of epic proportions' after independent labs find no EPO

Kieran Pender

Lawyers for the Australian Olympic star Peter Bol have blasted anti-doping body Sport Integrity Australia (SIA) as "completely wrong", in a letter alleging that Bol's sample which tested positive for synthetic erythropoietin (EPO) never actually contained the performance-enhancing drug.

The letter declares that Bol "is innocent and always has been". It calls on SIA to publicly end the ongoing anti-doping investigation and admit its mistake.

Bol, who rose to prominence with his heroics at the Tokyo Olympics, tested positive for the prohibited substance in his A sample in January. But last month his B sample returned an atypical finding, which saw his suspension from competition lifted, although SIA's investigation remains ongoing.

The saga has now been reignited by the letter, from Bol's American lawyer Paul Greene of Global Sports Advocates. In the correspondence, sent to SIA last week, Greene alleges that the government body was "wrong" to conclude that Bol's A sample contained synthetic EPO, "wrong" to conclude that the testing had complied with international standards, and "wrong" to continue the investigation "when there is no evidence whatsoever that Mr Bol ever used synthetic EPO".

▲ Australian Olympic track star Peter Bol says he was 'innocent and waiting for it to be proved' Photograph: Dean Lewis/AAP

The latest development in the Bol saga was first reported by Nine newspapers, and has been independently verified by Guardian Australia.

The claims are based on two expert reports provided to SIA by Greene, from Professor David Chen at the University of British Columbia and four Norwegian researchers, Professor Jon Nissen-Meyer, Professor Erik Boye, Professor Bjarne Østerud and Tore Skotland. Both reports conclude, according to the letter, that "there is no evidence to show the presence of synthetic EPO in [Bol's] urine". Guardian Australia has seen the reports.

EPO is a naturally occurring hormone produced in the kidneys, but can be synthesised (sometimes referred to as rEPO) to aid performance and recovery in athletes. The controversy in the Bol case has highlighted ongoing disagreement among scientists about the best method to test for rEPO.

The SARS-Page gel test measures EPO levels across five different bands, relying on subjective visual analysis of the intensity of the bands, while the IEF-Page method uses isoelectric focusing. The initial positive test was reached using the SARS-Page method, and Professor Chen's report is critical of the failure to undertake further testing.

Chen concluded: "The [data] showed absolutely no evidence for the presence of any rEPO in the two samples tested."

The Norwegian research group reached the same conclusion. "We conclude that there is no scientific evidence provided by the laboratory which proves the presence of recombinant EPO in Bol's urine," they said.

The legal letter outlines a number of alleged errors in the laboratory testing process which led to the interpretation of a positive result. It alleges "this was not even a close call. Instead, this was a blunder of epic proportions."

Sport Integrity Australia was contacted for comment.

Bol has returned to training, but will not compete in the Australian Track and Field Championships, which begin in Brisbane on Monday. He is understood to be eyeing a return to competition in Europe in May.

Bol himself says he was "innocent and waiting for it to be proved".

"I knew it would come," he told Nine newspapers. "The people who analysed it had no idea who I was, and it shows in detail how [ASDTL] messed up. I want them to acknowledge that. I don't want to fight, but I don't want to go quietly either. We want to improve the whole sport. You can't have innocent athletes getting done for something they've never used."

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Socceroos turn focus to new World Cup qualifying cycle after loss to Ecuador

Australian Associated Press

▲ Australian goalkeeper Joe Gauci in action during his Socceroos debut against Ecuador at Marvel Stadium on Tuesday night. Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

Socceroos coach Graham Arnold has delighted in Australia's learning experience and unearthing of depth against Ecuador as he turns his focus to the start of a new World Cup cycle and next year's Asian Cup.

Arnold shrugged off a difficult 2-1 loss in the second match in Melbourne, four days after a 3-1 victory in Sydney, instead savouring his four debutants and building depth.

"It was a great series. It's a great opportunity to give some of the young boys an opportunity and also to see what it takes to be top players," he said. "A team in South America that finished fourth in their qualifiers. They did well at the World Cup.

"These types of things are great learning experiences for the players. We set a challenge for the boys at the start of the camp of winning the series. So, me being positive, we won the series: one win each, we scored four goals and they scored three."

Arnold delighted in goalkeeper Joe Gauci's debut while Alex Robertson, Aiden O'Neill and Jordan Bos all showed signs in their respective first games.

"I see this as a fantastic 10 days," Arnold said. "We found players. We found three, four or five kids that can handle the level. And they're only going to get better. But we need to expose them to these types of things.

"When you see players that can deal with those types of teams and those types of players, you just know that the future is bright for the kids. Before the camp, it was about finding some more players and getting players ready for it. Which players could step up? It's been a win, for me."

Arnold noted his players would learn from Ecuador's physicality but said they got far more out of their two games than they would have against a weaker opponent.

European-based Socceroos were due to fly home early Wednesday morning. That includes midfielder Riley McGree, who will switch his focus back to Middlesbrough's bid for promotion to the Premier League.

"I've got high expectations of myself, that I want to set the bar as high as I can and do things that I've dreamed of doing," he said.

The Socceroos hope to play two games at home in the June window but are yet to lock in opponents. They are also eyeing action in September before taking on England at Wembley in October.

Arnold will stay in Australia to watch the A-League Men finals while deferring scouting responsibilities in Europe to assistant René Meulensteen. The Socceroos are expected to continue their attempts to woo prospects and Italian youth internationals Cristian Volpato and Alessandro Circati.

Spurs 'urgently seeking' clarification from Fifa on Fabio Paratici's ban

Paul MacInnes

▲ Fabio Paratici pictured at Tottenham's game at Manchester City in January. Photograph: Simon Stacpoole/Offside/Getty Images

Tottenham are "urgently seeking further clarification from Fifa" after the club's managing director of football, Fabio Paratici, had his ban in Italy extended worldwide.

Paratici will have to step away from his job after Fifa said it had extended a ban imposed on him when his former club Juventus were found guilty of false accounting.

On Wednesday night Tottenham responded with a statement which read: "This committee deliberation has been taken with no advance notice to any of the parties involved. We are urgently seeking further clarification from Fifa as to the details of the extension and its variance from the [Italian FA] sanction."

Juventus were docked 15 league points in January at the resolution of a long-running investigation. Paratici, who joined Spurs in 2021, was among a number of former and current Juventus executives to receive lengthy bans, after a hearing at the federal court of appeal.

His 30-month ban initially applied only to Italian football but Fifa said in a statement on Wednesday in response to a question from the Guardian relating to Paratici: "Fifa can confirm that following a request by the Italian FA (FIGC), the chairperson of Fifa disciplinary committee has decided to extend the sanctions imposed by FIGC on several football officials to have worldwide effect."

Juventus have denied wrongdoing and they and Paratici have appealed. Fifa's move comes as Tottenham seek a replacement for Antonio Conte, who left his post as manager by mutual consent on Sunday, and make transfer plans.

On Tuesday Tottenham published an extended interview with Paratici in which he described Conte's departure as "the right decision" and urged everyone at the club to focus on a successful end to the season.

After the update regarding Paratici's ban the Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust called for clarity from the club and brought the future of Harry Kane, whose contract expires in June 2024, into the equation. "This news adds further to the extremely concerning situation at the club," it said. "No manager, no director of football and uncertainty around our star player and our end-of-season finish. Fans deserve to hear a clear statement of strategy."

The forward Son Heung-min has said he was saddened by Conte's exit and feels responsible. "As a player, I am really sorry," he said. "He's a world-class coach and we had a great journey together … I should have played better. I feel responsible for his departure because I haven't helped the club all that much."

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Steve Clarke draws on Dalglish history to inspire Scotland victory over Spain

Ewan Murray at Hampden Park

▲ Steve Clarke inspired Scotland to one of their best wins in years. Photograph: Ian MacNicol/Getty Images

Steve Clarke revealed he used the memory of an iconic Kenny Dalglish goal against Spain in 1984 to inspire his Scotland players towards a 2-0 victory over the same opposition at Hampden Park.

Dalglish notched the third goal of a 3-1 win which was the last success for the Scots against Spain until Scott McTominay, with two goals, sunk Luis de la Fuente's men. Scotland's head coach later explained how he drew upon history.

"I spoke about Kenny Dalglish scoring that goal in 1984 and I said to the players: 'That's what it means to the country,'" Clarke said. "I told them: 'If you can produce a result against one of the top teams in Europe, people will speak about you in years to come.'

"I am delighted. The players were outstanding from the first minute to last. It was a big night and it feels like a big step forward for us as a nation and a team."

Scotland now top Group A with six points from two matches as they chase a spot at Euro 2024, but Clarke remains cautious. "I told the players you don't qualify with six points," added Clarke.

"It was a big win but there are plenty of games to go. One bad game can set you back so we stay focused and keep our feet on the ground.

"The dynamic, enthusiasm and quality of the team didn't change. It's a big night, it feels like a step forward, but it's only six points."

De la Fuente said he was "satisfied" with his team's display. Rodri, the Spain captain, was less magnanimous in defeat as he criticised Scotland's approach to the game. "We conceded easy goals," he said. "This is football, if you concede easy goals you are penalised.

"It's the way they play, but for me it's rubbish, always wasting time, provoking you, always they fall.

"For me, this is not football. The referee has to take on this, but he says nothing."

Which manager had the highest win percentage when they were sacked?

Guardian sport

▲ Avram Grant, Thomas Tuchel with Kylian Mbappé, Carlo Ancelotti, and Craig Burley. Composite: Getty Images; Shutterstock

"Julian Nagelsmann was sacked by Bayern Munich despite a win percentage of 71.4," says Oisin Hughes. "With a minimum of, say, 10 games, is this a record?"

When, in 1990, that esteemed philosopher Robert Matthew Van Winkle sang, "Anything less than the best is a felony," he evidently had a vision of 21st-century football. Europe's superclubs have become so dominant that entitlement and expectation are greater than ever and Julian Nagelsmann's departure continued the modern trend of managers being sacked for failing to achieve perfection. When you've won 10 Bundesliga titles in a row, as Bayern have, being a point behind the leaders just won't cut it.

Nagelsmann's win percentage of 71.4 is good, but it's not quite Carlo. Everyone's favourite cuddly cigar smoker, Signor Ancelotti, has twice been sacked despite a win percentage in the 70s. Bayern binned him in September 2017 after he had won precisely 70% of his games; like Nagelsmann, Ancelotti won the Bundesliga in his only full season but was knocked out in the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

Ancelotti's previous job was at Real Madrid from 2013-15. He won the Champions League in 2014 – not just any Champions League, but la decima – along with the Spanish Cup. But the following year Real won nothing apart from the Uefa Super Cup and the Club World Cup. Their Champions League defence ended disappointingly against Juventus in the semi-finals and Ancelotti was on his happy-go-lucky way at the end of the season. He left Real with a win percentage of 74.79.

That puts him 0.01 behind Thomas Tuchel at Paris Saint-Germain. Tuchel was in charge for two and a half years, during which time he took PSG to their first Champions League final, but they lost 1-0 to Bayern and started the following season poorly. Tuchel did win the Champions League that year – with Chelsea, whom he joined soon after getting his P45 from PSG.

Unsurprisingly, given their business model, PSG have a number of ex-managers on this list. Laurent Blanc (72.83%) was sacked in 2016 and his replacement, Unai Emery, left two years later with a spectacular win percentage of 76.32. There is a caveat here: technically Emery left by mutual consent when his contract expired, though most people assume he was sacked.

While Emery makes our list, we've put him and the other mutual consenters in italics. That means the clubhouse leaders, both with win percentages of exactly 75%, are Manuel Pellegrini and – yep – George Burley.

Let's start with Pellegrini. He was appointed Real Madrid manager in 2009, at the beginning of the second *galactico*era, and by most measurements did pretty well. Madrid finished second behind Pep Guardiola's extraordinary Barcelona with a La Liga record of P38 W31 D3 L4 F102 A35 Pts 96. They flopped in the Champions League though, going out to Lyon in the round of 16, and were humiliated by Alcorcón in the Copa del Rey. With José Mourinho – fresh from winning the Treble with Internazionale – available at the end of the season, Pellegrini was on his way.

Burley had taken charge of 12 Hearts games, winning nine, when he was sacked by the club's flammable owner Vladimir Romanov. This is taken from a previous Knowledge about managers who were sacked while their team was top of the league:

Finally, the highest win percentage we can find for a manager who was sacked by an English team is Avram Grant's 66.66 at Chelsea in 2007-08.

Here's the full list. We've only included managers with a win percentage in the 70s and those in italics left by mutual consent. If you have any more, get in touch.

76.32: Unai Emery (PSG, 2016-18)

75.00: Manuel Pellegrini (Real Madrid, 2009-10)

75.00: George Burley (Hearts, 2005)

74.80: Thomas Tuchel (PSG, 2018-20)

74.79: Carlo Ancelotti (Real Madrid, 2013-15)

72.83: Laurent Blanc (PSG, 2013-16)

71.91: José Mourinho (Real Madrid, 2010-13)

Goals but no cigar

We covered this question back in 2007, though inevitably it pops up from time to time when some poor sucker scores a futile bagful so it's well worth an update. Let's start with the people who were mentioned in that column 16 years ago.

Four goals

1982-83: Kerry Dixon (Doncaster 7-5 Reading, Division Three)

1989-90: Dariusz 'Jackie' Dziekanowski (Celtic 5-4 Partizan Belgrade (agg: 6-6), Cup Winners' Cup first round; Partizan through on away goals)

1996-97: Milinko Pantic (Barcelona 5-4 Atletico Madrid (agg: 7-6), Copa del Rey quarter-final)

1997-98 Christian Vieri (Salamanca 5-4 Atletico Madrid, La Liga)

Six goals

1960-61: Denis Law (Luton 2-6 Man City – match abandoned, FA Cup fourth round. City lost the replay 3-1 despite Law scoring again)

Seven goals

1922-23: Billy Minter (Dulwich Hamlet 8-7 St Albans City aet, FA Cup qualifying fourth round replay)

As for more recent examples, a number of you mentioned Andrey Arshavin scoring all of Arsenal's goals in a madcap 4-4 draw at Anfield in April 2009. Arsenal led 1-0, 3-2 and 4-3 before being pegged back each time, although the draw was ultimately more costly for title-chasing Liverpool than Arsenal.

▲ Carlo Ancelotti watches on as his Real Madrid side succumb to Juventus in 2015. Photograph: Daniel Ochoa de Olza/AP

And it was a positive boon for trivia columns circa 2023.

We also missed a few last time round, including a couple of not-as-famous-as-they-should-be examples from World Cups.

Marcos Garcia mentions Peter Noble, who scored all four goals for Burnley when they drew 4-4 at home to Norwich in the old Division One in 1975-76. And Russell Connor has two tales from the turn of the century. "Facundo Sava, who latterly used to take that odd mask out of his sock at Fulham, scored four in Gimnasia's 6-6 draw with Colon in 2000," he writes. "A year earlier Toni Brogno scored four in Westerlo's 6-6 draw with the reigning champions Genk, in a game that also featured five penalties, four red cards and presumably a decent amount of injury time."

Finally, Dan Seppings, who really deserves his own byline this week, says the Vieri example mentioned above is one of five occasions in Europe's top five leagues that a player has scored four and lost. They are:

1909-10: Albert Shepherd (Liverpool 6-5 Newcastle, Division One)

1914-15: Jimmy Cantrell (Middlesbrough 7-5 Tottenham, Division One)

1973-74: Delio Onnis (Stade de Reims 8-4 Monaco, Ligue 1)

Continued on page 48

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1997-98: Christian Vieri (Salamanca 5-4 Atletico Madrid, La Liga)

2004-05: Cristiano Lucarelli (Parma 6-4 Livorno, Serie A)

Ups and downs in one season

A few weeks ago we looked at players who appeared for the champions and a relegated team in the same season. Dan Seppings has sent in a list of everybody who has achieved this peculiar double in the English top flight – including fourplayers in Leeds's title-winning squad of 1991-92.

1889-90: Billy Hendry (Preston and Stoke)

1894-95: Davy Hannah (Sunderland and Liverpool)

1933-34: Jimmy Dunne (Arsenal and Sheff Utd)

1966-67: Willie Anderson (Manchester United and Aston Villa)

1986-87: Kevin Langley (Everton and Man City)

1987-88: Ray Houghton (Liverpool and Oxford)

1991-92: Chris Kamara (Leeds and Luton)

1991-92: Imre Varadi (Leeds and Luton)

1991-92: John McClelland (Leeds and Notts County)

1991-92: Tony Agana (Leeds and Notts County)

1992-93: Neil Webb (Man Utd and Nottingham Forest)

1993-94: Gary Walsh (Man Utd and Oldham)

2014-15: Loïc Remy (Chelsea and QPR)

Can you help?

"Has a referee ever had to go off in a league game?" tweets @jaymc82.

"The bookmakers quoted the Netherlands at bizarre odds of 1-1,000 to beat Gibraltar on Monday. "Has there ever been shorter odds for a football match than this?" asks Philip Rebbeck.

"The term 'Test match' seems to exist in most sports, usually in reference to international fixtures. Was this ever the case with football and if so, when and why did it stop being used?" asks George Taylor.

"Has a player ever been sent off, then sent off again in their first match back after suspension? Assuming this has happened many times, has a player ever seen red in three consecutivegames for which they were eligible? What's the record?" asks James McWilliam Woods.

Mail us your questions or tweet @TheKnowledge_GU

Hervé Renard quits Saudi Arabia to lead France at Women's World Cup

Reuters

▲ *Hervé Renard greets supporters on Tuesday before his final game as Saudi Arabia's coach, a defeat by Bolivia in Jeddah. Photograph: AFP/ Getty Images*

Hervé Renard has resigned as Saudi Arabia's coach so he can take over the France women's team before this year's Women's World Cup. The 54-year-old Frenchman was appointed by Saudi Arabia in July 2019 and led the country to a famous 2-1 win over Argentina at the World Cup in Qatar last year.

The Saudi Arabian Football Federation said it had agreed to terminate Renard's contract at his request and wished him "every success in his future career". Its president, Yasser al-Misehal, told Saudi Sports Channel: "[Renard] has an offer from the French federation and expressed his desire to take this opportunity. We were informed four days before the current international window and I received a letter from the French federation, and consulted with a number of members of the board of directors, and we decided to accept this request."

The French Football Federation sacked Corinne Diacre this month after the captain Wendie Renard, Kadidiatou Diani and Marie-Antoinette Katoto said they would not play at the World Cup under "the current system". France, ranked fifth in the world, will be looking to win a first World Cup at this year's showpiece, which is being co-hosted by New Zealand and Australia from 20 July to 20 August.

Renard said after a 2-1 friendly loss to Bolivia in Jeddah on Tuesday that he taken Saudi Arabia as far as he could. "I think I did the maximum with the team," he said. "I can't reach another level so I prefer to be honest with everybody. Thank you again, it was fantastic time."

Misehal said a new coach would be not be appointed until June at the earliest.

England Under-21s slip to Croatia defeat despite Morgan Gibbs-White penalty

PA Media

▲ *The England Under-21 captain, Jacob Ramsey, battles with Hrvoje Smolcic of Croatia at Craven Cottage. Photograph: Ryan Pierse/The FA/ Getty Images*

England Under-21s slipped to a 2-1 defeat by Croatia in their final warmup match ahead of this summer's European Championship. Lee Carsley's side were bidding to sign off for Georgia with a fourth friendly win out of four, having beaten Germany, Italy and, on Saturday, thumping France 4-0.

But Carsley changed all 10 outfield players for their last tune-up match and they had only a late Morgan Gibbs-White consolation from the penalty spot to show for a ragged display at Craven Cottage.

It is not just the senior England side who have recent history with Croatia; the under-21s were on course for the quarter-finals at the last Euros when a last-gasp wonder strike from full-back Domagoj Bradaric knocked them out on goal difference despite a 2-1 win.

Curtis Jones scored in that match, and the Liverpool youngster had England's first shot on target repelled by goalkeeper Dominik Kotarski after a cross by Manchester City's Cole Palmer.

The lively Palmer then teed up Tommy Doyle, who could not recreate his spectacular long-range FA Cup winner for Sheffield United against Blackburn nine days ago with his shot this time flying over the crossbar.

Instead Croatia took the lead in the 34th minute after debutant Rico Lewis was booked for bringing down Lukas Kacavenda outside the box. Martin Baturina stepped up to curl a superb 20-yard free-kick inside James Trafford's near post.

Carsley made just one change at half-time, replacing Bolton's on-loan Manchester City keeper Trafford and handing West Brom's Josh Griffiths a debut. But Griffiths' first task was to face a penalty after Luke Thomas clumsily brought down Matija Frigan in the area. Dion Drena Beljo coolly sent Griffiths the wrong way from the spot to double Croatia's lead.

Griffiths did well to limit the damage with a smart point-blank save to deny Kacavenda and another fine stop to keep out Gabriel Vidovic. For the hosts, Palmer and Jacob Ramsey both stung the hands of Kotarski who then pulled off a stunning save to keep out a header from the substitute Gibbs-White.

England finally got on the scoresheet four minutes from time when Kotarski tripped Gibbs-White in the box, the Nottingham Forest man tucking away the spot-kick. But, with Gareth Southgate watching from the stands, the hosts were unable to find an equaliser on a frustrating night in west London.

'It's been a journey': Republic of Ireland's James McClean shares autism diagnosis

PA Media

James McClean, the Republic of Ireland international, has revealed he has been diagnosed with autism.

The 33-year-old made his diagnosis public in an Instagram post on Tuesday during World Autism Acceptance Week, prompting his wife, Erin, to write of her pride. McClean underwent an autistic spectrum disorder assessment after recognising traits he shared with the couple's daughter, Willow-Ivy.

He wrote: "As you all know, my daughter Willow-Ivy is autistic. The last four years have been life-changing in the most amazing way, but also very difficult at times as her daddy watching her overcome so many obstacles in her life and learning how to manage the challenges she faces on a daily basis.

"The more Erin and I learned about autism, the more we began to recognise I was very similar to Willow in more ways than we thought. I see so many small traits in her that I see in myself, so I decided to go and get an ASD assessment.

"It's been a bit of a journey and now having a diagnosis I feel it's time to share it, for the week that's in it. I have debated for a while going public in sharing this as I've done this for Willow-Ivy, to let her know that I understand and that being autistic won't and should never hold her back from reaching her goals and dreams. Daddy's girl."

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